

## The Lord's Chosen Cornerstone

Luke 20:16-19

September 17, 2023

Well, we are back in Luke 20 this morning, this week, to finish the parable of the wicked tenants or the Lord's tenant problem, and what he was dealing with, and the tenants who had control of his vineyard. This week we're looking at the final section of the parable. We're gonna start by reading the parable. You'll find that in Luke 20, verse nine and following. We'll read the parable, get a quick review, and then see how the people and the leaders react as the Lord applies this parable to them.

We'll start by reading in Luke 20, verse nine. "He began to tell the people this parable: 'A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. And when the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard.

"The tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. He sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.'

"But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' And they threw him out of the vineyard, killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.'

"When they heard this, they said, 'Surely not!' But he looked directly at them and said, 'What then is this that is written: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

After his deft handling of the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders in their attempt to reign Jesus in, and call him

to give an account to them, for what he did in the temple, and cleansing the temple, and casting out all the buyers, the sellers, the money changers; all the cacophony and the chaos that was going out of the temple environment, in the temple of the Gentiles.

They want him to give an account for that authority that he showed, and for the authority of his teaching, as he took residence in the temple and started teaching the people; healing them of all their diseases. So, as they come to him, challenge him, call him to give an account, he handles that in the first eight verses of chapter 20.

And then Jesus turns to the people. Having addressed their leaders, he now turns to the people to tell them a story. Tell them a parable that recited their national history back to them, summarize it for them, and then to warn them about what would soon happen in Jerusalem. As we mentioned last time, or saw last time, the man who planted the vineyard and leased it to tenants and then went away, that's a picture of the Lord God of Israel.

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The wicked tenants, those who occupy the vineyard, they represent the leaders of the nation, for sure, these chief priests, scribes, elders, who are standing there, in their midst, but people of Israel are represented by these tenants as well. They are captured, portrayed in this image of wicked tenants, because they have gone along with their leadership. They have done the sins that their leaders have led them to do.

In a twist of the rich imagery of the parable, in Israel's biblical history, Isaiah five, one to seven, Psalm 80, Hosea 10:1, Ezekiel 19, and other passages; the vineyard itself, in this parable, unlike those passages, in this parable the vineyard itself does not represent the nation. The vineyard represents the privileges that God gave to the nation of Israel.

Paul lists some of those privileges in Romans nine verse four: adoption, glory, covenants, law, worship, promises. All those are the privileges that they are to steward. God gave special privileges, spiritual privileges to Israel, different than any other nation on the earth. They were there to produce fruit from those privileges. They were to steward those privileges as a, as

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a vine dresser stewards a good healthy vine. Throughout its history, though, Israel failed to render up the fruit of the vineyard.

Luke, here in our text, we can see it in comparison with Matthew and Mark, but Luke has abbreviated what Jesus said here. In Matthew's account, in Mark's account, the fuller picture connects with Isaiah five verse two, and it makes the extent of the owner's provision and investment very, very clear.

The owner not only planted the vineyard, but in terms of Isaiah 5:2, he also fenced it in. He built a wine press in its midst. He built a tower, set that in the middle of the vineyard. He made sure that the vineyard was well protected, well provided for. So, when the landlord sends his servants to collect the rent, it's a rent that he expects to be paid in wine. Thus, the need for the wine press.

The wine pictures, celebration, gladness of heart, coming from the vintage of that crop. The tenants not only refuse to pay the rent that they owe, but they reject the servants completely.

Treat them harshly. Treat them with scorn. Treat them with increasing levels of violence.

By this point in the story, as the audience listens to Jesus tell this story, the audience is thoroughly engrossed in the story, totally engaged. Also, they're troubled, and at this point, and we ought to be feeling this too, they are becoming restless as they hear this. They're becoming agitated in their spirit, as they hear this. And so are we, as we hear this inexcusable treatment of the servants who have come from the owner of the vineyard.

To Jesus' audience, and probably to us, too, this owner, his patience seems just a bit unwise. It even seems somewhat foolish. It, it, it turns out to be, in these cases of these servants, funding their trips, sending them back, receiving nothing. It's a costly miscalculation. By this time, he's forfeited years of rent payments, so he's been taken advantage of.

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But the utter rejection of three of his servants comes at a further cost of blood and treasure, and now, also, at the cost of his reputation. That is to say, people are starting to ask the question, can this owner protect his servants? Is this just, for him to send more servants to that vineyard, and not to demand an accounting?

So the audience is wondering, and so are we, why this Lord has not armed his men, and marched his private army back to that vineyard, and executed those criminals, who've taken over his property, stolen his revenue, and beaten his people. Justice demands, and accounting demands, that they pay up. Now, these servants, they represent, obviously God's prophets sent to Israel over the years, over centuries.

They came seeking fruit from the people, seeking the fruit of repentance, seeking the fruit of God's privileging them. They called the people, to just, do justice, basic things. Do justice. Show mercy to people. Walk in humility. Gratitude to God, maybe. That'd be a good thing. Love God; worship him. God's kindness to them. It's manifest in repeatedly sending his

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prophets to confront their sin, to call people to repent, and do that over and over; many seasons, many seasons, instead of rejecting them and destroying them.

Listen, this is a picture of God's mercy, God's grace, God's love, is it not? Those who are enslaved to sin, those who are wicked and unrepentant, they never interpret God's love as love. How do they interpret it? As hate. They ignore the fact of his patience. They misinterpret grace as law, as an unwarranted imposition on them, as an unjustified meddling in their life.

They turn the grace of God on its head and demand that God ignore their sin, rather than confront it. That is not grace. That is wickedness. So, as we come to verse 13, Jesus pictures the Lord, here, pondering the situation, kind of a soliloquy. We've seen some of those in the parables that Jesus tells in Luke's gospel. In particular, Luke likes to emphasize these soliloquies, this little personal reflection and, and, here's the Lord pondering the situation, saying to himself, what shall I do?



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And by this time, we can almost hear the crowd interrupting and saying, 'March on those wicked tenants. March. Take back your vineyard, already. Enough of this.' Instead, though, once again, in this portrayal of the kindness and the long-suffering of God, the Lord of the vineyard says, 'I'll send my beloved son. Perhaps they will respect him.' Well, verse 14, they don't. They don't respect the vineyard owner's son, at all.

The demonstration here of their character in the past, that is a reliable indicator of a predictable outcome. "When the tenants saw him," they said to themselves, "They said to themselves, this is the heir, let's kill him so the inheritance may be ours." The landlord's son, when he showed up, they figured the landlord himself is dead.

So, this boy showing up to claim ownership, he's there for a personal appearance. He's there, maybe to get the rent, but then to go to the courts and say, hey, this land is mine, let's cast these vineyard tenants out. Tenants figured to themselves they hadn't paid rent in at least three consecutive years. So there's no, if no counterclaim of the title deed, would, could be made,

that is to say, if the heir to this property is out of the way, the vineyard would be theirs. That's their plan.

So, in verse 15, they threw him out of the vineyard and they killed him. By this time, the agitation of the audience had grown to a boiling over point. Their irritation with what they're hearing in this injustice, is, can no longer be contained. They can no longer remain silent.

And so, here's where we get into a first point for our outline today, number one: The people's objection. Number one: The people's objection. The question that Jesus asked at the end of verse 15, 'What will the owner of the vineyard do to them?' Seems rhetorical here in Luke's gospel, especially since Jesus immediately seems to answer it for himself, in verse 16.

Seems like a rhetorical question that he then turns and answers immediately. When we compare this, though, with Matthew's account, we find that it was actually the people who answered Jesus first. If his question was meant to be rhetorical, according to Matthew's gospel, they didn't take it that way.

They actually entered into the story. They entered into the parable and they interrupted him and gave him an answer.

Matthew 21:40, Jesus asked, "When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to these tenants?" In Matthew, the people are so engrossed in the story, so engaged, so caught up in this injustice; this point, they are totally on the side of the vineyard owner, and they cannot help but interject, in Matthew 21:41, and it comes across as interruptive, here.

He will, this is what the people say; they're listening, and they say, he will put those wretches to a miserable death. He'll let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons. It's important to pause here for a moment. Let that response from the crowd sink in. When Jesus asked at the end of verse 15, here in Luke 20, 'What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?' This, this is what he intended to do.

He intended to drive this audience to a verdict, to get them to think about what should be done here. And he has succeeded. We

can see, in reaching into their conscience, and turning it on, and for these people, a Jewish audience, in this day, in this century, is not an easy task at all. We'll come back to that.

People who have received grace, how is it that they then later harden? How is it that they turn on God's love? How do tenants reject him, who is entered into a contract with them? How do they reject him, who has leased his land to them? Let him. Let them use his vineyard and all that's his, all that he's provided for, all that he's provided for their future protection, all of it to improve their own financial position, to build their wealth. How does it happen that they turn on him?

Last week we talked a little bit about the historical situation that informs this parable. The Latifundia in Galilee, referring to the absentee, the situation of absentee land owners.

Foreigners who owned the land, but they were living abroad, and then the Jewish peasant farmers, who lived in the land, and lived in Galilee, and they worked the land as tenants. That's the situation that informs this parable.

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We said last week, the Galilean peasants, they felt justified, at times, many times, in not paying their rent. In scheming against these foreigners, the imposition of foreigners in their land, they even committed acts of violence against them.

The latifundia situation fed this revolutionary spirit. Especially one that came from Galilee itself, gave rise to several messianic figures, all of whom failed, but nonetheless they were able to gather revolutionaries, in some cases even march.

That historical background. It's in the heir. It's people are listening to this parable. Nationalistic sympathies stirred up in them by the way that Jesus has set this scene. People would sympathize with the tenants. Their, their prejudiced. Their bias would be for the peasant cause, to favor the tenants and their cause against the landowner. The audience would be inclined to prefer the tenants over the legal claims, the paper claims. I mean, it's just paperwork, of an absentee landowner.

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If you back away from this a little bit, what Jesus audience, these Jews, failed to notice, the situation of the foreigners in the land; the Roman occupation of Israel, of Judea, of Jerusalem, all that was preceded by a, a, Greek conquest, and there was a Maccabean revolt against the Greeks, as well.

But all the rest of that history, the Jews, they had forgotten that it was God who gave them this land. It's God who gave them this promise. It was God to whom they owed honor and gratitude. It was God who warned them, that if they did not pay the rent, if they did not produce the fruits of the privileges they'd received, you know what would happen to them? They would be cast out, just like the Canaanites.

Failed to see, that it was God who had expelled them. The Jews, in and of themselves, as a people, they had no rights to speak of. The Jews had received privileges from God, manifold privileges, and kindnesses, and that means that they had duties to pay, the duty to God, a stewardship to account for. It was they who failed to give God his due.

It was, they who failed to give God the fruit of the vineyard, to render to the God, who gave them this land, to render to God obedience, and honor, and praise, and love, and worship. And instead of seeing their fault, they blame the foreigners. As we can see, though, by the end of the parable, the people's sympathies have shifted completely. Haven't they?

By the end of the story, they have abandoned the tenant's cause, and they have taken up the landowner's side, and they've condemned the tenants. Certainly, this shows the power of Jesus to tell a story. But more profoundly, these nationalistic sympathies, on their part, have given way to the cause of true justice, to the cause of righteousness. Jesus has succeeded in penetrating through these hard Jewish hearts. Pierced through the barriers of their insulating nationalistic pride, their self-justifying spirit of Jewish superiority.

Isn't it fascinating to see how the kindnesses and the graces of God can be taken, so for granted, that they become like a shield against any softness. And yet, Jesus has done what none of the prophets were able to do, at least in this moment, he

succeeded in reaching into the people's conscience, to flipping a switch to, to, making a adult conscience sharp again, so that they feel this.

So clear is the case before them. So just is the cause, and especially in this, so kind, and so patient, and so incredibly long-suffering, even to this incredulous degree, the people can't help but side with the landlord over the tenants. And so, since, according to what we know from Matthew 21:41, since the people have come to the right conclusion, condemning the tenants, what we read in Luke 20 verse 16 is really Jesus repeating the people's verdict, back to them.

He will come, and he will destroy those tenants, and he will give the vineyard to others. Jesus wants them to hear what they just said. He wants to voice that out loud. He wants to repeat it, for emphasis. So, he repeats back to the people, nearly verbatim, the verdict that they themselves pronounced. He will come. He will destroy those tenants. He'll give the vineyard to others.



It's at this point, that we hear the people's objection, end of verse 16. "When they heard this." What's this? When they heard their own conclusion, spoken back to them. When they heard what they just said, but now through Jesus' mouth, spoken back to them, repeated back to them. When they heard this, they said, 'Surely not!' They answer emphatically.

And when they answer, they are using the strongest negation in the Greek language, *me genoito, me genoito*. We usually hear that, *me genoito*, phrase in Paul's writing. In fact, of the 15 uses of, *me genoito*, in the scripture, this is the only one outside of Paul's writings. The expression, *me genoito*, means, may it never be. Perish the thought. Don't even let them. God forbid. Don't even let that thought exist.

Emphatic negation. Almost like demanding that the very suggestion, this deplorable thought that just came out of his mouth, is so false it must be permanently stricken from the record. So why? What's their objection? I mean, hadn't they just given the same verdict themselves? (Matthew, 21:41). Why this

sudden immediate reversal? Why a change of mind? Why this emphatic reversal on their part?

Well, it's one thing when they're rendering a verdict on someone else, right? Characters in a story, fictionalized tenants who are acting in a reprehensible manner. Sure, condemn them, as long as, it's just make-believe. Foul! Blow the whistle! Throw the flag! When the thought though begins to dawn on them that this story is really about them, that they might be the tenants in the parable, hold on a second here. Not so fast.

Jesus has just done to this audience what the prophet Nathan had done to David, when David was blind to his sin. Remember, David had taken the wife of Uriah, one of his most faithful, decorated soldiers. He committed adultery with her, and when she became pregnant, David tried to cook up some schemes, some ways that he could find, that Uriah would think that he himself was responsible for the pregnancy.

You remember the story. And when that didn't work, because Uriah had, come to think of it, he had too much integrity. Well, David

arranged for Uriah to be killed on the battlefield. Joab put him in the front, and then at a certain signal, that Uriah doesn't know, go ahead and pull all your troops back, leave him out there hanging, so he can get killed.

A year or more had gone by, since David had committed these crimes, all with David thinking that he had gotten away with his sins before men. Anyway, we see from the Psalms that his conscience was killing him, but still he was blind, at that point, to the true nature of his sin. He was ignoring the pangs of his conscience; the accusations coming from his conscience.

He ignored it for so long that his conscience became dull. Stopped accusing. He gave up the fight against David's hardness of heart. Everything went back to normal. So, God sent Nathan to David. Nathan told David a little story, little parable, about a rich man with many flocks, many herds. And this poor man, one poor man, who had nothing, but one little ewe lamb, which he'd bought with his own money.

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Okay, so, what was David before he was a King? Shepherd boy, right? Nathan said, this man, this poor man, one little ewe lamb he bought with his own money. He saved all his pennies in a Piggy Bank, and they emptied him out and bought a little, little, ewe lamb. And he brought it up; he grew up with him, with his children, and it used to eat of his morsel, and drink from his cup, and lie in his arms. And he was like a daughter to him.

Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and the rich man was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the guest, who'd come to him. But he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him. Outrage! David hears this; he's outraged. This trap that Nathan set for him, and the story just sprung shut.

David pronounced the verdict, a just verdict. The man who has done this deserves to die. Indeed, it's true, David. That's very true. Nathan turned and looked at David and said to him, you are the man. That is what Jesus has just said to these people while

standing in the temple. You are the man. You are the wicked tenants.

The owner of the vineyard, the, the, vineyard you all have been tending for all these centuries, to no avail, to no profit. He will come, and he will destroy you wicked tenants, and he will give his vineyard to others. And that is what evokes this emphatic objection on their part. *Me genuito*, perish the thought. God forbid it. May it never be.

Listen, in the mercy and the grace of a loving confrontation, in an act of great kindness from God, God had sent them Jesus, his only begotten Son, his dearly beloved, to confront these people in their sins. He's doing it right there, right in front of them. He's calling them out for their wickedness as tenants, for failing to give God the fruit that he is owed.

And as the parable makes clear, God extended grace upon grace, upon grace, beyond all measure; hoping the sending of his beloved son would affect these people, would soften their hard

hearts, would open their eyes to the depths of their guilt. Do any of us have a precedent for thinking that might go that way?

David, when he's confronted by Nathan, and Nathan, says, "you the man," not in a good way. "You are the man." David said, "I've sinned against the Lord." He didn't make a big show of it. But later, in the privacy of his own chambers, he puts the pen to paper, parchment, and he writes out Psalm 51, baring his heart before the Lord.

Yeah, there's a precedent for God's kindness and his mercy, his confrontation, breaking a hard heart, softening it, bringing it to repentance. But it doesn't happen here. When it dawns on these people, after they have agreed with him about the verdict, and they realize the parable is about them too, that they are the wicked tenants, they reject that conclusion. They refuse to admit their guilt. They harden their hearts, and they refuse to confess their sins and repent.

Gentiles: You Christians, don't make the same mistake that the Jews did. Paul warns us about this in First Corinthians chapter

ten. He says, in several things, in that whole chapter, are very good. But he says in verse 11, "Now these things happen to them." To who? To Israel. "These things happen to them, as an, as an example." They're written down for our instruction; on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands; take heed, lest he fall.

Listen, Sin is so subtle, wily deceptive. It insinuates itself so easily into our hearts. It taints our judgments. It perverts our motives. It inflames our pride. Self-deception is a very real thing, as we're seeing right in front of us. So, Christian, be warned. Don't let the grace, the past grace of God, harden you toward his grace in the present.

If God sends you the confrontation, the kind and loving confrontation of a friend, a brother, or a sister, soften your heart. Don't harden it. Examine yourself. See if there might be some truth, some benefit that you can have through that self-examination. While these wicked tenants in the parable, and how it pictures these people, we're going to see it's justified. The character of the people has just been exposed.

The attitudes and the actions of Israel's past are reliable predictor of the present. And they are predictor of the outcome, because in three days, they will crucify him. The tenants in the land will join with the absentee land owners, the Gentiles, and together the world will crucify Christ. Now we might think that that would be enough. You are the man.

They don't repent like David does, and so Jesus doesn't let them off the hook. He continues to press the verdict that they gave by connecting that verdict with one of their favorite Psalms. So, we see a second point in verse 17, number two; The Lord's application. The Lord's application. In response to the verdict of judgement, and in response to the decision to turn the vineyard over to others.

And the others, there are, we could just say, the Gentiles in general. The people objected, "Surely not!" May it never be. And then in verse 17, Jesus applies the parable to the people. It says there "But he looked directly at them." The verb is *emblepo*. He fixed his gaze on them. He stared straight at them.



Stared earnestly at them. You might say he bored a hole through their heads.

Godet, Frederic Godet thinks this is a menacing expression. Today's vernacular, we would say, he stared them down. Had to be uncomfortable. Had to be a pause, as he's staring at this crowd, looking at each one of them in the eyeballs. We keep reading and find out why. "He looked directly at them and said, 'What then is this that is written: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?"

Two days earlier, these same people chanting excitedly from this very Psalm, this verse, Psalm 118, Psalm 118, verse 22, this verse about the stone that the builders rejected. That's only a few verses earlier than Psalm 118, verse 26. And verse 26 of Psalm 118, you don't need to go back to Psalm 118 to read it. You heard it read this morning.

But just look back across the page at Luke 19:38, and we can see that the multitude of the people are rejoicing. They're praising God and they're quoting Psalm 118, verse 26, "Blessed

is the king who comes in the name of the Lord." Why are they saying that publicly at his procession into Jerusalem.

Because year after year, Jewish pilgrims, they came to the festivals in Jerusalem and they came saying these Hallel psalms. Psalm 118 was one of their favorites. Hallel means, it comes from a verb that means to praise. This Psalm, in particular, is a an Egyptian hallel Psalm. It doesn't mean that the Egyptians came up with it. No.

It's a Psalm that's Moses and Israel brought out of Egypt, or wrote coming out of Egypt. It's a Psalm of national salvation, that even though they're surrounded by the powerful nations, God is their salvation. That's what the Psalm 118 proclaims. They loved the parts of Psalm 118, like the open and the close of the Psalm, which we emphasized in our Bible reading and prayer time, "Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever." Verses like that in Psalm 118, verse ten and following.

You don't have to turn there. But all verse ten says, "All nations surrounded me; in the name of the LORD I cut them off! They surrounded me, surround me on every side; in the name of the Lord I cut them off! They surrounded me like bees; They went out like a fire among thorns." What is this called in Hebrew poetry? It's called stair step parallelism, where it starts out with one thought and then expands it in the next line, then expands it even further. That's what is being done here.

Even though "they surrounded him, surrounded him on every side, surrounded him like bees going out like a fire among thorns in the name of the LORD, I cut them off! I was pushed hard, so I was falling, but the Lord helped me. The LORD is my strength. The LORD is my song. He has become my salvation."

And now, "the stone that the builders rejected," verse 22. How did the Jews think about that verse? Well, they saw themselves, the nation of Israel, as that stone. Those who rejected the stone, obviously, those are the surrounding nations, those are the Gentiles, the other nations.

And by rejecting the Jews, they had rejected the Lord's cornerstone. That is them, the most important nation on the earth. The nation that set the standard for all the other nations. The nation that's to be a light to the Gentiles. So all the nations are basically pictured as one large temple built unto God. They, Israel, cornerstone of all the nations, and the temple of praise going up to God.

By the way, just in case you are unfamiliar with the significance of a cornerstone; cornerstone of a building is the most important stone of that building. It's the, it's the stone that that building cannot do without. It is the most important stone of the foundation, not just primarily as a load bearing stone in the foundation, but because all the other stones in the foundation guide off of that stone.

So, every single stone in the building depends on that cornerstone, not only being the strongest, but being cut accurately, and planed and shaped perfectly. Hendrickson says, "The cornerstone finalizes the shape of the entire building; for being placed at the corner formed by the junction of two primary

walls. It determines the lay of the walls in the crosswalks throughout. All the other stones must adjust themselves to this cornerstone." End Quote.

So, the Jews had interpreted Psalm 118:22, as the Gentile nations rejecting Israel; the one nation God chose above all others; to make Israel the most important nation on the earth. Now it's not that Israel was wrong about that, it's just that they were incomplete. Under Moses, leaving Egypt, heading into the promised land, to dispossess the other nations is a very unlikely story, isn't it?

These former slaves coming out of Egypt, they cut a sorry figure against the military might and military wealth of the Canaanite nations. Giants in the land, they themselves, appeared to be as grasshoppers. But nations of the earth, Canaanites, all those giants in the land, be forewarned, the former slaves of Egypt, this rabble, this nothing people that God has chosen, because God has chosen them, they're favored by God. You had better watch out. That's how Israel understood this parable.

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They weren't entirely wrong; they were just incomplete. The first error that Israel made is in failing to take God's grace into account. They needed to see that their elevation above all the other nations of the earth was a privilege. It's a high and holy honor, God had bestowed graciously on Israel. And by failing to recognize that, that they're chosen, and set apart by divine grace, not by their own merits. Moses makes that so clear in Deuteronomy.

Don't think that I chose you out of all the nations because you're better, because you've got something to commend you. I actually chose you for the exact opposite reason. Because you are lowliest among all nations; you are nothing. And so, because of your nothingness, my grace and my power will be manifest in you.

And Paul says much the same thing about us as Christians. First Corinthians one, "Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble. But God has chosen us, the foolish things of the world, to shame the wise. God's chosen us the weak things of the world to shame the strong." And on it goes.

Their first error is in failing to recognize that God has elevated them because of his grace, not because of their merits, and that they have a stewardship to the nations. Israel had grown proud, become arrogant, hard hearted. So, invasion was the result. And then exile. First invasion of the Northern Kingdom through the invasion of Assyria, and then in exile. Then the invasion of the Southern Kingdom, invaded by Babylon and then exiled to Babylon.

The second error that Israel made, is in failing to understand that the fundamental cause of the nation's rejection of Israel is not primarily Israel itself, it's the fact that Israel represented God. It's the fact that their law came from God. It's the fact that their words were revealed by God. Now that offends people.

Isaiah said to Hezekiah about Assyria, remember when Sennacherib sent the Rabshakeh to intimidate Israel, come to their walls and tell them, you know, you're going to, you're doomed. You're doomed. Come. "Come to Assyria. Every man under

his own vine. Every man having his own fig tree. Don't let Hezekiah deceive you."

Remember that Hezekiah took the letter from Sennacherib, laid it out before God, and prayed. God sent the prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah to strengthen him and said this about Assyria. Assyria, "she despises you, she scorns you- the virgin daughter of Zion; she wags her head behind you - the daughter of Jerusalem." They might think they're the stone that the builders rejected.

"Whom have you mocked and reviled? Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes to the heights?" Sennacherib, "against the Holy one of Israel!" Oh, you messed up. It's not primarily Israel, for Israel's sake, that the nations reject. In fact, the more that Israel turned away from God, the more the nations embraced them. Come on, come to our feasts. Marry my daughters. Come celebrate at our festivals. Come to our ritual sacrifices. Love to have ya. So open, so gracious, so inviting. No boundaries.



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Greeley

You and your God, you got all kinds of boundaries. You're really narrow. Come Molech worship, man, it's good. Baal, awesome sins. Rain, food, love it. You're gonna love it. Come on in. No restrictions. No exclusive membership like you Israelites have. The only thing we're gonna require is your soul. That's in the fine print.

So the Jews are exiled twice; exiled to Assyria; exiled to Babylon. When the Jews returned from exile under Nehemiah, the governor, and Ezra the scribe, they, they, found comfort once again in the national interpretation of Psalm 118. In fact, we read this in Ezra 3:10, as they rebuild the Temple.

"When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, the priests in their vestments came forward with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals, praise the LORD, according to the directions of David king of Israel. They sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD. for," and then the quotes from Psalm 118, "for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel." That's the first and the last line of Psalm 118.

All the people shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. The responsive singing that the people did that day, at the laying of the foundation, they are chanting Psalm 118. First and last line indicates that the whole Psalm was saying, responsively; a song of national salvation.

Nations had rejected them, yes, but God had chosen Israel. God had restored Israel to the land, sent them back. They are the chief cornerstone and the restored nation is back in its rightful place in the land. The concrete evidence, no pun intended, because the foundation, the house of the Lord, was laid. It's the reason that Ezra gives.

Unfortunately, Israel failed to notice something very crucial; prophetic, clarifying, coming from Isaiah. What they failed to notice is that one of their own prophets, one of the servants that the Lord had sent to the tenants, who worked the vineyard, the prophet Isaiah. And this is prior to the exiles. Prior to their return.

So before Ezra, before the passage we just read, Isaiah provided a divinely inspired commentary on Psalm 118, verse 22. Most of the people, nearly all of them, had failed to notice it. There are two verses. I'll have you write them down. You don't need to turn there right now, but write down Isaiah 8:14 and 15, and then Isaiah 28:16; Isaiah 8:14 and 15, and Isaiah 28:16.

In Isaiah 8:14, "The Lord of the hosts will become a sanctuary, and a stone of offence, and a rock of stumbling." Get this, "to both houses of Israel, and a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." Now that's saying, Isaiah is saying, the Lord himself, if he is the stone of offence, if he himself is the rock of stumbling, well then how can the stone that the builders rejected be Israel, primarily?

Isaiah 28:16, just as clear, adds another piece of the puzzle, though. Lord said, "Lord God said, 'behold, I am the one who has laid a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation.'" And now we see by putting those together, the Lord God is not only the stone that the

builders rejected, but as that stone, the Lord God has also laid the stone.

He's the one that chose this cornerstone, the one that is tested and precious, a sure foundation. Well, who is that? Isaiah continues in Isaiah 28:16. When he calls for a response from the people, response of faith, "Whoever believes will not be shaken." So the stone rejected by the nations, it's not Israel per se, it's none other than the Lord God.

When Israel experiences that rejection, it's because of the Lord. Further, if the rejected cornerstone is God himself and Jesus is the Son of God, God in the flesh, then once again the rejection is because, "in Him the fullness of deity dwells bodily." He is the incarnation of God. "Jesus looked directly at them," verse 17, and he presses the implications of Psalm 118, verse 22 on the people.

It's not like these texts from Isaiah are unknown to the people. Perhaps some of them are ignorant of Isaiah's commentary on the rejected stone. But I can tell you, some who were there

in the crowd that day, they understood Jesus perfectly. Who are they? The scribes and the chief priests.

Verse 19 says, they knew that he told this parable against them. Oh, they got the message loud and clear. So, Jesus has applied Psalm 118, verse 22 to the people, and they're not the good guys. He's indicted them. He's put them under conviction.

And he's also warning them, here, that the stone the builders rejected, that's another reason, that the Lord of the vineyard comes in verse 16 to destroy those tenants, and give the vineyard to others. They've rejected the one that God had sent. The beloved son, connected here, Psalm 118, verse 22, he's the stone that the builders rejected. God himself in the human flesh.

Listen, beloved people cannot reject the confronting, convicting grace of God and get away with it. People want the kind of the grace of God that provides for them, that gives protection, that blesses the fields and the vineyards. The, the, kind of grace from God that brings wine in its harvest, grain in

its time, that fattens up the cattle, fattens up the sheep. It gives us wool and good food to eat.

We want the grace of God that panels our houses, that builds our portfolios, that gets us that job, that gives us fun holiday celebrations with our family at Christmas, times like that. People don't much want the grace of God that confronts them in their sin. It holds them accountable. Calls them to repent. Cannot bifurcate the grace of God. You can't divide it and take the parts you want, and reject the others.

It is the grace of God, and it is as hard, and as firm, and as put together, as a stone, in its integrity. You either accept all of God's grace, in all of its ministry, or you accept none of it. That's what we find here, for rejecting the cornerstone, Matthew 21:43. Jesus said, "Therefore, I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits."

Jesus is not finished there. We come to verse 18, as Jesus drives this warning home, he says, "everyone who falls on that

stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him." He's citing a common proverb known to the people. If a stone falls on a pot, woe to the pot. If a pot falls on a stone, woe to the pot. In either case, woe to the pot.

That's the proverb. Point is impossible to miss. Clay pots against a hard stone don't fare well. Same thing when people oppose God; same result, they do not fare well. Image, biblically, may come from the vision in Daniel 2:44 to 45. Remember when Daniel interpreted the dream of nick, King Nebuchadnezzar. The frightening image that he saw in his dream of a human statue? Head of gold, chest and arms of silver, it's middle of and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, feet of mixed with iron and clay.

And as the king is watching, there in his dream, a stone was cut out, by no human hand, and as it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, it broke them in pieces. The entire statue, the whole edifice representing all human government, comes crashing down to the ground. The verb for breaking pieces,

there in the Hebrew, is an onomatopoeic word. *deqaq*, it's the sound of clay breaking. *deqaq, deqaq, deqaq*, smashing to pieces. It means to crush, pulverize.

So what's the message? Take special care. Don't reject the Lord's chosen cornerstone. For many, Isaiah 8:15 says, many shall stumble on the stone of offence, on the rock of stumbling. They shall fall and be broken. They shall be ensnared and taken. So watch out. Be warned. Jesus said it this way, "Blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

The only way that any single one of us, or us collectively as a people, I mean, we're nothing, but clay pots ourselves, right? The only way that we're not destroyed, when this stone comes a tumbling, when we encounter this crushing cornerstone. Here's the plan. If we're in the stone, when it comes to crush the kingdoms of the earth and pulverize them, then we are safe. Right? Well, for most of the people, sadly, the warning falls on deaf ears.



Same story today. Same exact story. As with all Jesus parables, even though they serve to further harden the hard hearted, they actually do have an effect of softening and drawing those whose hearts are soft, humble, contrite. And that, really, is why the Lord looked directly at the people, in verse 17, and posed this challenge, and sounded this warning, in the form of the question. What then is this?

His application of the parable is not only going to, har, further harden those, whose hearts are hard, it's also going to draw those who believe, those who have ears to hear. They're going to hear something and draw near. Draws, them to, them to himself in several ways. First, just by citing Psalm 118, verse 22, and all the illusions, and connections it has to other parts of Scripture, that they knew, including Isaiah.

Jesus is demonstrating the continuity of his own ministry; the authority of his ministry, with biblical authority. There's a question earlier in the text about his authority, where it comes from, what nature it is. It's biblical. It's biblical authority. So Jesus draws believers to himself. He makes his case from

Scripture. Scripture that has the power to illuminate, to draw, and then to save.

True believers always respond well to scripture. Unbelievers twist the scripture, ignore the parts that convict them, and ultimately end up rejecting the scripture. Second, in citing Psalm 118, verse 22, here's another way that Jesus draws the people to himself. He wants the people to see the connection to the parable, that the judgment to come on the tenants of the Lord's vineyard, coming judgment is wholly justified.

He wants them to take God's position, and they do for a moment. The door shuts for many of them, and they end up crucifying the son. But in pronouncing the verdict on the tenants, the people agreed with the psalmist, agreed with the prophets, agreed with the son himself. But the fact that they had not immediately bowed down, confessed their sins, that they had not repented, well, these people are justly condemned.

And so, Jesus here, three days away from his crucifixion, he's showing them there's still time. There's still time for you.

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There's still time for you, soft hearted people, for you believers, those of you who recognize the truth of the word of God, there's still time for you to confess and repent. You, whose hearts are opened by the regenerating grace of God, seize the opportunity before you.

So, Jesus draws in believers, in the warning itself, because in that warning, those who have humble hearts, they detect a sliver of opportunity to repent and they are eager to run through that sliver, and take it, and grab it, when they get the chance.

Third, in citing Psalm 118:22, Jesus uses this to draw the soft hearted to himself. Showing the connection to the parable, he wants people to see, that in the final, culminating act of the wickedness by the tenants, the killing the landowner's beloved son, he's predicting his own death. He's gonna be murdered in three days by many of these people who cry, crucify him, crucify Him. And they will see that there is no reason that this one, who is innocent, should die. Why then does he die?

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Why then does the Lord allow him to die? "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Psalm 22 makes the case that it's not because of his own sins. That Psalm makes the case, it's because of their sins, that God placed their sins on him and he died for them. It's a gospel reference. He's helping them to see the need for substitutionary atonement. That his death, his rejection as the stone, his death on the cross, it's for their salvation.

In saying that, he's doing something else here too, he's given them hope. He's given them hope. Those with eyes to see, ears to hear, a heart to understand and believe, Jesus is promising the people that the death of the son is not the end. It isn't the end. It's not a failure in God's program. It is, in fact, the beginning of God's work to restore, to fulfill all Old Testament Scripture, to fulfill every single promise. That's what God is doing.

In fact, that was a burden in the early church. We could see it attested to throughout the New Testament, especially in Paul's work in Romans nine to eleven. It's his burden to show that the crucifixion of Christ, the Messiah, is not a failure on God's

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part. Does God bring about conception and development in the womb, only to not be able to bring that birth to the light? Is there a failure in God? Is his arm too short to save? Is he not strong enough to deliver, to do his work?

It's a burden that the early church had to answer over and over again. There's no failure in God's program. They need to go back and rethink the texts that they thought they had down. "The stone the builders rejected became the cornerstone." It's the Lord's doing. It's marvelous in our eyes. Marvelous meaning; wonderful meaning. There are mysteries here, packed into this message, that I never knew. Marvelous in our eyes.

Behold, I am the one who has laid a foundation in Zion. I laid a stone. I put a tested stone there, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation for you to stand on. Philip Riken tells about an incident supposedly occurred in the building of Solomon's first temple, and he writes this, "The great stones of the temple were cut at the quarry, then chiseled into the right shape before being transported to Jerusalem. When they were slid into place.

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"Apparently one large stone turned out to be the wrong size and shape, so when it arrived at the building site, the workmen set it aside. It was the stone that the builders rejected. But to everyone's surprised, that unwarranted stone later turned out to be exactly the right size and shape to serve as the cornerstone. The stone at the corner that squared the building."

We know that some of these people will listen. They will respond in faith and repentance. They will join the apostles in the early church. These humble repentant believers, the new tenants of the Lord's vineyard. They are built upon the foundation, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:20, "The foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with whom Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone,' from whom or, "in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord."

People's objection answered by the Lord's application, Psalm 118:22, to their consciences. Well, how do the leaders respond? Not well. Point number three, this is very short, the leader's rebellion. The leader's rebellion. Luke's postscript in verse 19

says, "That the scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour."

The verb there, *Epiballo*, pictures the anger of the religious leaders. It means to throw something over or upon someone. These men are enraged. They are furious. Adrenaline is surging through their veins, and they want to throw their hands on Jesus. Why? Because verse 19 says, "They perceived he had told this parable against them." You think? Yeah. And yet we see, once again, they are man fears, not God fears.

Two contrary impulses, here, to throw their hands on Jesus, being filled, as they are, with anger. But once again, the leaders, it says, "feared the people." Even in the most hard-hearted of sinners, their motivations are driven by the fear of man. Man-centered theology producing man fearing.

Since the stronger impulse is the fear of man, they planned this settler approach in verse 20. "So they watched him, sent spies, those who pretended to be sincere." The word for sincere, there, it comes from *dikaios*, it's righteous. They appear to be

righteous. They appear, by every metric, to be upstanding citizens. Righteous people have righteous, I'm just concerned about grace. I'm just concerned that you guys do the right thing, follow the, the, right plan. So, they're going to come to Jesus. But it's in order to catch him in something that he said, so as, to deliver him up to the authority, in the jurisdiction of the governor.

And with that, we're often running into the next narrative, about whether or not they should pay taxes to Caesar. I mean, everybody wants to know, should we pay taxes to Caesar? We're going to find out, next time, we come back to this text, whether or not we should pay taxes to Caesar. But listen, this is a set up. They're just hoping to catch him in something he said, want to bring him, bring a charge against him before the Roman governor.

And when Luke tells the story of the new tenants who take over, he tells that story, of the new tenants who take over, in the second volume called *The Book of Acts*. And he records how these new tenants, led by the twelve apostles, they recognized Jesus,



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as the Lord's chosen cornerstone. There is a narrative in Acts four, of Peter and John standing before the Sanhedrin.

They've been arrested for healing a man who was lame from birth. They healed him right here, in this environment, in the temple. They arrested them for healing the man in the temple and for teaching, just like their master. Says in Acts 4:7. When the Sanhedrin had set them, set them in the midst. Put them in front of them. Put them before the, the, stand. "They inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?'" Wow, that sounds familiar.

Luke tells us, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to the, the, rulers of the people and the elders Acts 4:11, "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, it's become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there's no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Peter, the little stone, little Petros. He confesses publicly his faith in the cornerstone. Jesus, who is the Christ. That's

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the Petra, the big stone. He and the others of the twelve, along with the prophets, form the foundation of the church. Again, Ephesians 2:20, "with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone."

And Peter says in his writing, we're joined together into this new temple, as new tenants, to work the vineyard. You come to him as a living stone, rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious. You, yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

As new tenants in this vineyard, when our Lord seeks produce from his vineyard, let's make sure that we give him what He's asking for, shall we? As a people, let's be quick to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. Let's learn from the sins and the errors of the former tenants, that we must be soft hearted people, always teachable, always humble before God; meek spirited before one another, as Paul said, "Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." Amen.

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Let's pray. Our Father, we do pray for the grace from you, that would keep our hearts soft, that always would produce in us the fear of God. That is the beginning of wisdom. That we would do what is right, and good, and loving, and true. That you would help us, oh God, before you, to always walk in humility and contrition, always aware that everything in our life, even our breath itself, is a gift from you, and everything we have from you, we give back to you as a stewardship.

Please keep us faithful, holy, soft hearted, humble, teachable, and meek with one another. Let us never harden our hearts against you, against others, but let us always manifest the effect of grace in our lives that would keep us soft and pliable. Listening closely to you. We love you, and we thank you so much for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ, who has taught us all these things. It's in his name we pray. Amen.