

## **Parable of the Tenants**

Good morning Southwest Family Fellowship. Happy last week of July! Hopefully August cools down even just a little bit. June and July have been kind of brutal. I have known at least 7 or 8 people that have had AC units go out during this summer, including my house, AND.. my favorite Chipotle that I go to fairly often. This past week I made it in right before they closed for the day so they could fix their units.

We are going to be finishing up our Summer in the Parables series today with the Parable of the Tenants. It takes place in Matthew 21, Mark 12, and Luke 20. We will be reading the Matthew 21 version, but all are very similar.

Just like our last few Parables it is yet another Parable that Jesus is telling to the Pharisees and religious leaders. The setting for this Parable is in Jerusalem and Jesus is telling it

inside the Temple to these religious leaders. He is trying to teach them and show them the error of their ways and how they must change to truly follow God. They are still stubborn and refuse. This Parable is told by Jesus shortly after he told the Parable of the Two Sons that we talked about two weeks ago.

Sometimes I imagine this time in Jesus' ministry when he's constantly correcting and challenging these religious leaders, to how I feel trying to teach my two dogs and correcting their behavior. You're constantly showing them and teaching them and walking through the mistake with them, but it doesn't seem to stick. Jesus has been teaching these principles and ideologies in so many different ways trying to get it to stick but they just don't get it and don't want to change their actions or behaviors.

We have been putting a deck in at our house and the workers really like chicken wings

and meat on a bone. But they sometimes leave the bones or food scraps in some of the work area, holes or areas of the yard that Cheyy and I don't see it right away. So then when we let out our dogs we see them beelining for different areas and then pop out chewing something.

So lately every time we let them out we are watching them like hawks, and chasing them trying to correct and change their behaviors as scavengers. But it seems like no matter what we do, what we show them, how we reason with them, they don't want to stop eating these food scraps. I'm sure that is how Jesus must have felt trying to talk to these religious leaders and teach them. He's trying to influence them to change their behavior and change but no matter what, no matter how he reasons with them, they don't change.

He is yet again reminding the Pharisees that they have denounced and rejected John the Baptist's teachings as well as his, and are rejecting the truth about God. This Parable further illustrates this point. Let's dive into, Matthew 21:33-46

#### The Parable of the Tenants

33 "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place.  
34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.  
35 "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

38 “But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

40 “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

41 “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

42 Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures:

“‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?”

43 “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 Anyone who

falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. 46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.”

In this parable, the landowner is God, the vineyard represents Israel, and the tenants are the religious Jewish leadership. The servants being sent were the Prophets of Israel and finally the son being sent was Jesus himself. He was predicting his own inevitable death as he would be killed by these religious leaders. They were stuck in their own righteousness and ways and wanted to kill him. So they could have their inheritance with God to themselves, but really

they were condemning themselves as they were turning their back on God's own son.

This leads us into our first point for today, **This Parable shows the peril that comes with the rejection of God's Messengers.**

The vineyard owner had sent his servants to go collect what was rightfully his in the form of his cut of the crops produced that year. His servants were going on routine visits to collect their master's dues. But the tenants who had rented the vineyard did not want to pay or keep their contract with the owner and instead harmed or killed each servant that came. They were sending a message that they did not respect or honor the owner. They were rejecting his demands and the contract they had established.

Throughout history, God had sent prophets and messengers to the people of Israel, but many were rejected, mistreated, and even killed. The people of Israel were rejecting God's

demands, his heart and the contract (or covenant) he had established with them. This happened over and over. They consistently would reject God's messengers. This pattern of rejection highlights the importance of recognizing and accepting God's messengers in our lives.

Throughout the Old Testament we read about different prophets sent to lead and help Israel but often they were treated poorly, killed, and not listened to. The people of Israel and those that listened rejected the messengers of God. This led all the way up until Jesus came, with the last prophet being John the Baptist. He too was treated poorly, not listened to by the religious leaders and later beheaded and killed.

In this Parable we see the vineyard owner first send some servants to collect his fruit or his profits from the harvest on his land. They are harmed and killed so he sends even more, but

they are treated the same. The tenants are constantly rejected his messengers and agents.

N.T Wright has this to say about this whole dynamic (Matthew for Everyone), “The whole story is therefore Jesus' way of explaining what was going on then and there. It is Jesus' perspective on the very events he was involved in - rejected by those he had come to, but destined to be vindicated by God. The vineyard owner is of course God; the vineyard is Israel; the farmers are Israel's officials, and the slaves are the earlier prophets, ending with John the Baptist. The Son can only be Jesus himself.

It is a story full of depth, sorrow and power. It tells how he has now come to Jerusalem, to confront the tenant farmers, with God's demand for **repentance**, for Israel, to be at last, what it was called to be, the light of God's world, and it is the story of how Israel, through its official

representatives, is going to refuse the demand, and will end up killing him.”

Israel's officials have rejected the prophets (the servants in the story), and Jesus, (the son in the story) showing the exact parallel to this parable. Let us not fall into the same trap of pride and arrogance as the tenants and religious officials did, but instead be open to God's messages, even when they challenge us. Being challenged to grow, live better and be renewed is not an attack on us, it is a calling up, to be better and more holy. Unfortunately the religious leaders and tenants did not see this, they were clouded by their pride and self righteousness.

Their rejection of Jesus is leading to the vindication by God. These are the perils of rejecting God's messengers. Their inability to lead Israel well and lead them into God's arms, into his love and grace have plagued them to be

taken out of their positions of authority and Jesus being vindicated.

This means that all the allegations, blame and discourse thrown on Jesus' name will be wiped free, it will be shown to be false and these leaders and teachers will be revealed as the corrupt and fallen individuals that they are. This Parable also has Jesus explain that he is the cornerstone that is being rejected. This is a fulfillment of prophecy from Daniel 2 and Psalm 118. It is the culmination of all the rejection of God's messengers, as even Jesus himself is rejected and he as the cornerstone is vindicated and becomes the solid and unshakeable foundation of our faith and salvation. (PICTURE OF CORNERSTONE OF STRUCTURE)

We will get into this understanding of the cornerstone and its implications a bit more but the rejection of Jesus/ the cornerstone led to him being broken and crucified for us. The

cornerstone was broken and crucified but once resurrected and redeemed it became the foundation of our salvation and grace. He came to call for repentance and a renewal, so that Israel could be the light to the world that God had desired. They end up rejecting him and killing him and we see the ultimate peril of the rejection of God's messengers.

The rejection of Jesus was necessary so that they would crucify him and the prophecy would take place. He as the cornerstone had to be sacrificed and killed to redeem all mankind of their sins. His rock being broken upon the Earth created the cornerstone of which our salvation, grace, and faith rest upon and are founded upon. There is peril that comes along with rejecting God's messengers in our lives but in this case the rejection of Jesus was necessary so that he could redeem and restore this broken and destitute land.

But knowing that happened we must now have our hearts and minds open to God's messengers. And with the Holy Spirit available to all of us that means that each and every one of us could be messengers to one another as we share words from the Spirit and are led by the Spirit to spread love and hope. The gospel and God's love and hope are not going to be met with open arms everywhere we go. God's messengers have been rejected and scorned for thousands of years.

Tom Wright says this about Jesus' time in Jerusalem, "If this was what happened when Jesus came to Jerusalem, what should we expect to happen when his followers go today to the places of power and injustice? What sort of reaction will the gospel receive when it is announced in places where people use religion - including Christianity! - as a means of reinforcing their own security instead of shining God's light

into the world? It may well mean rejection and violence; the history of Christian martyrdom, not least in the last century, bears stark witness to that."

The perils of rejecting God's messengers is seen strongest in religious communities sometimes. We see people using religion, Christianity and God's name to control, to deceive, and to hurt. This is despicable but it is also so easy to fall into this type of situation or community. This is why it is so important and crucial that we lean on the Holy Spirit to guide us and center our hearts on what's truly of God. That we ask for wisdom and guidance to detect things that are foul and dead, and seek things that are living and have evidence of the fruits of the Spirit in them. When we are able to do this and be in tune with the Spirit's guidance and can walk step in step with the Spirit, we will not be

deceived to reject God's messengers and his guidance.

Today, we must ask ourselves: Are we receptive to God's guidance and His messengers, such as spiritual leaders, mentors, or wise friends who offer godly advice? This peril of rejecting God's messengers is not something that is over. We can still reject and not listen to God's messengers and his message. We can be sidetracked and blinded by our pride, ego and ignorance. We can miss the message and reject what we are hearing or being guided in by the Holy Spirit or from Christ's own words in the Bible.

We avoid the perils of rejecting God's messengers and message by being rooted and centered in the cornerstone of Christ. When our foundation, identity and heart are solidly found in Christ's foundation that's when we begin to see the fruits of the Spirit develop in our lives and we

see the love and heart of God emanate out from us naturally. We see our faith naturally develop and grow.

This leads us into our second point for today, **Jesus calls us to Bear Fruit.**

In the parable, the landowner expected the tenants to produce fruit from the vineyard. However, when he sent his servants to collect the produce, they were met with hostility and violence. This lack of fruitfulness symbolizes the failure of the religious leaders to bear spiritual fruit in their lives and their resistance to God's will.

For us as modern-day disciples, this parable reminds us of the vital importance of bearing fruit in our Christian lives. The fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) should be evident in our lives. The Spirit should be working and breathing in our lives so

much that these fruits are outpouring out of us as examples of his love and faithfulness to others.

From elementary school through end of high school I played cello. It was a beautiful instrument and I loved playing it, but I knew that in order for me to be good and to improve and get better, I had to practice. In order to bear fruit and become a better cello player I couldn't just say I wanted to get better. I couldn't just stare at it a couple hours a day, I couldn't even just study the sheet music for a couple hours a day, that may help a little but only so much.

In order for me to truly bear fruit and become proficient at the piece we were learning or trying to perform, I had to practice. I had to back up my words and intentions with actions, I had to work to improve and develop. We can't just say we want to bear fruit, or intend to, or read all about bearing fruit, or even pray to bear

fruit, we must walk step in step with the Spirit as he guides us and works through us to bear fruit. It takes spiritual practice and action to grow and develop these fruit. In order to love others better, we must find situations to walk with the Spirit in, where we can practice loving others and growing in that. To grow in patience we have to find situations to walk in step with the Spirit to grow in patience during a specific situation.

These religious leaders said they had all this righteousness, faithfulness and were following the will of God, but their actions, their practice and their interactions did not show them bearing this fruit they said they had. This can happen to us as well. We must be rooted in the Spirit and allow him to guide us into situations where we can practice our love, our peace, our patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. We are led by the Spirit to do these

things, but he works through us to practice, grow in, develop in and bear these fruit and this love.

We are called to impact the world positively by showing Christ's love to others, leading them to God through our actions and words. Let us analyze our lives and ask ourselves: Are we truly bearing fruit for God's kingdom, or are we merely occupying space as unproductive branches? In this parable the tenants are tilling the land and managing it as it produces growth and fruit, but their own pride and greed keeps them from sharing in the blessings with the landowner. They want to keep it all for themselves.

This is an analogy for the religious leaders who have gained admiration, power and influence because of their religious prowess, so now they no longer want to share the blessings with God as they love where they're at right now and what they are getting. They have become unproductive branches occupying space

because they are no longer trying to grow and produce fruit and help bring forth new life by spreading the love and heart of God to others. They are withering branches filled with death that spread hate, and dissonance, and a comparing spirit.

**We can be like the Pharisees and religious leaders, were not always the good guys in the Bible stories**

In verse 42 we read Jesus quoting word for word Psalm 118:22-23 and he says, "42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

The stone being rejected is Jesus and the builders are the religious leaders and people in charge in Israel. They have rejected him and this is foreshadowing to Jesus' sacrifice and him

becoming the cornerstone of our salvation, faith and grace.

Stanley Hauerwas has this to say from his Matthew Commentary, “Peter, after the crucifixion and resurrection, uses the same passage from the psalm when he explicitly identifies Jesus as the cornerstone in Acts 4:11 and in 1 Pet. 2:1-8. Jesus is the cornerstone for the house in which he is the sacrifice acceptable to God.

The parable of the wicked tenants can serve as an outline of Matthew's understanding of the life of Israel. God called Israel to be his vineyard fenced by the law, grounded in the land, and protected by worship of God in the temple.

God sent his prophets to call the people to faithfulness, but the people beat, stoned, and killed them. Finally God sent his very Son, but even he has been rejected. Jesus makes it clear that all that was done by the landowner of the

vineyard was the Lord's doing. Therefore, the kingdom of God will be taken away from them and given to a people who produce the fruits of the kingdom. Moreover, anyone who falls on this stone will be broken, and anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

The kingdom of God went through a cleansing and a renewal when Jesus was sacrificed on the cross and became the cornerstone. It was out with the old regime of those living by the Law, and dictating how others should live and behave, using the Law as a weapon and as a controlling method, and in with a new regime of love and grace and renewal.

A regime filled with people not just saying the right things, but also doing them. A new follower of God and Christ that showed fruits of their faith, bearing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self

control. Those that see Jesus as the cornerstone and are humbled and accept him as such will be broken and renewed through Christ.

Their old hardened lives will be exchanged for new, free lives centered in love and bearing fruits of the Spirit. They see the errors of their ways, they see their sinful life and want a break from this path. So through repentance and forgiveness they are broken away from this old path of life and are set anew on a new path of righteousness and grace. And those that reject Jesus as the cornerstone will be crushed by the cornerstone, meaning that their hardened hearts and inability to be changed and called to repentance by this cornerstone bring God's judgement upon them. God is bringing a new kingdom with Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection.

This leads us into our third point for today, **The Kingdom of God will be given to those who accept Jesus as the cornerstone.**

Let's go back to the end of the Parable when Jesus finishes it up by explaining the tenants killed the son and now he asks the religious leaders this starting in verse 40,

40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

41 "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 Anyone who

falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

The religious leaders knew how to answer, they knew that the vineyard owner should punish the tenants and take away their land and give it to others who will bear its fruit and honor the owner and his son. Jesus replies by telling them that their time of manipulating others in God's name is coming to an end. The kingdom of God will be given to those who bear the fruit of God and those that honor and believe in Christ as the cornerstone of our salvation and faith. With Christ's soon redemption of all on the cross he is making a way for ALL to be saved and redeemed by Christ. This shows that not just Jew but also Gentile will have opportunity to be redeemed and saved by grace. Like verse 43 says the kingdom of God will be taken away from these hardened hearted religious leaders and those

opposing God's will, and given to those who will produce its fruit, which means renewed Jews but also Gentiles who hear the message of the gospel, repent, are saved and changed.

Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22-23 in this passage, stating that the stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone. Here, Jesus refers to Himself as the cornerstone, and the rejection He experienced foreshadows His crucifixion and resurrection. All the rejection God's messengers and prophets encountered over time was a foreshadowing for the ultimate rejection of Christ.

Despite the rejection, God exalted Jesus and made Him the foundation of our faith. He vindicated him and took all blame and doubt off himself and him being our savior. His death, resurrection and redemption of our sins became the foundation for our faith and salvation.

This cornerstone analogy teaches us that even in times of rejection, persecution, or hardship, God can use those very experiences to build and strengthen us. This Parable was a reflection of Israel's history and their time of having prophets come time after time, and time after time be rejected and scorned. It further foreshadows Jesus' role in this Parable. He tells the religious leaders in the temple that their rejection of him is bringing the righteous wrath and correction of God upon their heads.

We see their fear and their understanding in this passage. In verses 45 and 46 we see their response to this message Jesus just shared with him, "45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. 46 They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet."

Even in the midst of them understanding the Parable, understanding their role as the tenants, and understanding that Jesus was challenging their authority; they remained hardened, they doubled down on their rebellion and dissent from Jesus' teachings, and were trying to find ways to kill him and remove this obstacle to their status quo of power and influence in this community.

We may not be actively trying to kill and destroy Jesus physically in our lives, but anytime we choose to put other things before him in the form of idols, distractions and sinful behaviors separating ourselves from him, we are trying to remove Jesus as he's affecting our status quo. We like our comfortable lives, we do not want his influence and direction to disrupt that. When our competency at work, status in the community, wealth, influence in our family, or any other of a number of things cloud our heart to being fully

surrendered and submitted to Christ, we are like these religious leaders. We are trying to remove Jesus as the obstacle he is, because he's challenging our status quo and how we want our lives to be.

As followers of Christ, we will encounter challenges and face rejection for our faith. But just as Jesus overcame rejection to become the cornerstone of salvation, we can trust God to turn our trials into opportunities for growth and blessing. When we place Jesus as the cornerstone of our lives, we establish a firm foundation for our faith, ensuring that we can withstand life's storms and remain steadfast in our commitment to God.

The Parable of the Tenants shows up in three of the four gospels and is even found in some other historical literature like the Gospel of Thomas. I believe it is so widely written and documented because of its profound message. It

documents that God has brought Jesus to Earth to be the cornerstone of our faith and salvation. And that the Kingdom of God has been given to those who will bear its fruit.

Those that accept God's grace, receive salvation and now live lives reflecting this heart change where they produce fruit and share the love of God and his gospel to those they encounter. Rather than use religion or religious authority or understanding to manipulate and control others like the religious leaders in Israel had done for so long. The perils of rejecting God's messengers and message ran its course with the state and mindset found in the religious leaders. It is a warning and a challenge to all Christ followers. Don't pervert God's message or will for personal gain. It will poison and distort you until you no longer desire to follow his will or guidance.

Bearing God's fruit and remaining attached to the vine of God become afterthoughts to keeping power, influence and status. Comfortability and living blessed lives on Earth by human standards becomes the status quo and the mission. The gospels warn followers of Christ to avoid the status quo, avoid comfortability and to cling to the foundation of Christ as the cornerstone of our lives and faiths.

In reflecting on the Parable of the Tenants, we are reminded of the significance of accepting God's messengers, bearing spiritual fruit, and recognizing Jesus as the cornerstone of our lives. We must be diligent in nurturing our relationship with God, being fruitful in our actions, and building our lives on the solid foundation of Christ, so that we may become faithful and fruitful disciples in the Kingdom of God.

The tenants and the religious leaders refused to bear fruit, rejected the messengers of God, and rejected Jesus as the cornerstone. We must learn from them on what not to do. When we realize, believe and act out our faith on the basis that Jesus is the cornerstone of our salvation, faith and grace, we learn to welcome God's messages to us, we hear them better and we walk with the Spirit to follow his will and bear fruit. My prayer for all of us would be that we learn to do this and practice this.

Let's pray...

As you go today remember to bear the fruits of the Spirit, cling to the cornerstone of Christ, and lean into his love and message for us all.