

INTRODUCTION

The title of this message carries a double meaning. We're going to learn that Jesus was not only the rejected SON; He was also the rejected STONE.

A guy who was crossing the street to visit his neighbor. As he started to cross the street, a car was bearing down on him, so he stopped and backed up to the curb. The car stopped, so he started to cross, and the car started to move toward him. He changed direction and went back to the curb and the car moved toward him. Then he moved to run across the street and the car swerved in that direction. He moved left and the car moved left. He moved right and the car moved right. Finally he just stopped in the middle of the road. The car screeched to a stop right in front of him. He walked around to the driver's window and the window rolled down. The man was surprised to see a squirrel behind the driver's wheel. The squirrel said, "I just wanted you to know what it feels like."

As we walk with Jesus toward the cross I want you to put yourself in His sandals and try to experience what He experienced. On this final week before the cross, every evening, Jesus walked back over the Mt. of Olives to stay in Bethany, and each morning, he retraced His steps returning to Jerusalem to walk up onto the temple mount to teach and to debate the Jewish religious experts.

A few days ago, a group of us from East Texas stood on the very same Mt. of Olives and walked down the same trail Jesus would have taken. The Temple Mount is still there, but instead of the Jewish temple shining there, the Temple Mount today has the Muslim Shrine of the Golden Dome of the Rock. But it's the same area, and it wasn't hard to picture the city filled with pilgrims for Passover. Each day as He arrived in Jerusalem He was challenged to a debate with the religious leaders. I call them the religious mafia, or the religious snobs. These debates took place in front of thousands of people who had gathered for Passover.

Matthew 21:33-46. "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 went away on a journey. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them, 'They will respect my son,' he said. 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.' So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' '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.' Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?"' 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. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.' When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. They

looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.”

This parable is obviously an allegory. Each character in His story represented someone real. It says that the Jewish leaders knew He was talking about them. The immediate meaning of the parable is simple: (1) The Landowner refers to God. (2) The vineyard represents the nation of Israel. All the Jews were familiar with the passage from Isaiah 5 in which God planted a vineyard, which symbolized Israel. (3) The wicked tenants represent the Jewish religious leaders—the priests and people. (4) The servants sent by the owner represents the Old Testament Prophets. God sent dozens of prophets to Israel to warn them of their sin, but the Jews mistreated the prophets and killed many of them. (5) Of course, the owner’s son represents Jesus Christ. The Bible says “Christ came to that which was his own (meaning the Jewish people), but his own did not receive him.” (John 1:11) (6) The new tenants to whom the owner gave the vineyard represents the rest of us, the Church.

We tend to study the parables of Jesus from a human perspective rather from God’s perspective. You can see this tendency in how we name the parables. None of the parables had names in the original text, but some of the newer translations add titles. For instance, we all have heard of the “Parable of the Prodigal Son,” but when you look at it from God’s perspective, it really should be called the “Parable of the Forgiving Father.” A few weeks ago we studied a parable about how workers in a vineyard worked different lengths of time, but each got paid the same amount. The Bible may call it, “the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard,” but from God’s perspective it should be called the “Parable of the Generous Boss.”

Jesus used parables to show us what God is like. If you have an NIV translation, the parable we read today is labeled, “The Parable of the Tenants.” When you look at it from God’s perspective we should call it the “Parable of the Patient Landowner.” In this story Jesus teaches four foundational truths about the character of God. And once we uncover those truths, then we will find a corresponding personal lesson that we can apply to our lives.

1. GOD IS THE OWNER

Like the owner in the parable, God is the Creator and He owns all of Planet Earth and beyond. The Psalmist proclaims, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.” (Psalm 24:1) The tenants didn’t own the vineyard; the owner placed them there expecting to receive some of the grapes harvested. He didn’t demand all of the grapes, just a portion of them at harvest time. But the tenants rejected the owner’s request and acted as if they owned the vineyard. The essence of sin is declaring independence from your Creator—refusing to acknowledge God’s ownership of this world and rejecting His claim on your life. The essence of sin is saying, “I don’t need God. I am the master of my fate, the captain of my soul.”

Lesson: I don’t own anything; I just manage some of God’s property

Growing up in the South, most of us have heard the term “sharecroppers.” Sharecroppers were families who lived on and farmed land that didn’t belong to them. They plowed the owner’s land, planted the owner’s seeds, and picked the owner’s harvest. In return for their hard work, they

kept some of the food they produced and gave the rest to the landowner.

In a real sense, each one of us is a sharecropper for the Lord. We don't own anything; we just manage a part of God's creation. But sometimes we do the same thing these wicked tenants did—we start imagining we own the vineyard.

Adults laugh when a 3-year-old child or grandchild grabs a toy and says, "Mine!" They smile because they think, "This child isn't capable of buying or making this toy. Even though they claim it, I gave it to them."

I wonder how our Heavenly Father must feel when we walk into our house and say, "Mine!" Or when we get in our nice car and say, "Mine!" Or when we go online and check our account balance and say, "Mine!" No, it's not yours. Every good thing you have is a gift from God. Everything in this world is temporary except the Word of God and the souls of people.

2. GOD IS PATIENT

The owner of the vineyard sent a messenger to collect what was due him, but the sharecroppers beat him up and kicked him out. Now if this had been like an episode of Law and Order, the owner would have called the cops and sworn out an arrest warrant for the criminal sharecroppers. Can't you see it? The Jewish police would have galloped up to the vineyard on their souped-up camels with their blue lanterns flashing. But this owner simply sent another servant—and they killed him; he sent another and they stoned him. What do we learn about God from this story? He is patient with us.

Imagine you are landlord who owns some apartments. You send one of your employees to collect the rent and instead of paying the rent, the renter beats up your worker and says, "This apartment is MINE! I'm not paying a dime." That may be the way God feels when we sometimes claim ownership of what is really His.

Lesson: God sends many servants to communicate His will

This parable is about each one of us. God has prepared a vineyard for us to manage. That great job you have didn't come by your talent or good looks. God put you there. God is the Creator and He owns it all. He is coming today and demanding a return from you. He's not asking for you to give him 90% of what you have, or even half. He's says 10% is a good start, but He's not primarily interested in your money. He wants *you*. He's asking you to first acknowledge His ownership, His Lordship over your life.

He's reaching out to you in love and He has sent you plenty of messengers. You have the Bible. You have Christian radio and television. You have a World Wide Web filled with millions of Bible studies. There are reminders all around you that you have a date with death and you'd better prepare to meet your Creator. When you open the newspaper and read the obituaries, God is sending a message to you. When you drive by a cemetery, another messenger.

God is so patient with you that if you have rejected His offer a dozen times, or a hundred times, or a thousand times, He keeps sending you messengers. Today, I'm just the most recent messenger your Creator has sent to lovingly reach out to you to respond to the Owner's gracious offer.

In the 19th century, before radio or television, people in America found entertainment by listening to public speakers, called orators. One of the most infamous was a gifted atheist by the name of Robert Ingersoll. He traveled around the country delivering speeches on the foolishness of believing in God. He often concluded his speech with a dramatic challenge. He would shake his fist to heaven and say, "If there is a God, I dare Him to strike me dead in 10 seconds!" Then he slowly counted to ten. Women fainted and God-fearing people rushed for the exits, fully expecting God to send a fireball and consume Robert Ingersoll. Of course, nothing happened. Then Ingersoll would finish by saying, "Now how can anyone believe in God?" In one small Midwestern town, a godly woman laughed out loud and said, "Mr. Ingersoll, do you think you can exhaust God's wonderful patience in just 10 seconds?" Ingersoll later died at the age of 65 from heart failure. God was patient with him for many years. And He is patient with you.

3. GOD IS LOVE

In the parable, after the owner's servants had been rejected and abused, he takes an astonishing step—he sent his son. In Luke's version of this parable Jesus called him "the beloved son." In Mark's version, he is called "his only Son. He hoped the tenants would respect His son, and instead they killed him.

This parable not only highlights the love of God, it also reveals the utter wickedness of the human heart. The tenants of vineyard didn't kill the owner's son in the spontaneous heat of emotion; they made a calculated decision. They thought by killing the son, they could claim ownership of the vineyard.

Lesson: God sent His Son to convince me to respond to His offer

What is God's offer? He wants you to acknowledge His ownership of everything. He doesn't want your money, He wants YOU. He wants to have a loving relationship with you.

I was reading my Bible the other day, and I came across an amazing verse. When I read it I was blown away. It is probably the most important statement about God found in the Bible. I want to share it with you in case you've never read it. It says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16) Can you comprehend that? There is only one God and He has only one Son, and He loves us so much He sent that only son to reconcile our differences with Him. So what did we do? Did we run out to meet God's Son and fall at His feet in surrender? No, like the tenants in the parable, our sin caused the death of the Son of God.

That's what so amazing about God's love. I am a sinner by nature and by choice, but God still loves me, in spite of my sin. There's a great little chorus called "It was Before" that says, "It wasn't after I was worthy that He saved me; We never have to seek His grace as a reward; it

wasn't after I obeyed Him, that He loved me; it wasn't after I had changed; It was before."

How can you resist that kind of love? In the early 1960s, the publishers of *Time Magazine* were concerned about their declining circulation, so they designed a campaign to send out thousands of letters making an emotional appeal to potential subscribers. In the past, such mailings had been done manually, at a great cost in human resources. IBM was developing something called a computer, so they made a proposal to install a fully automated system that would write the letters, seal the envelopes, address them according to a selected database, stamp them and send them into the postal system without the letters ever being touched by a human hand. The huge computer was installed with much fanfare and anticipation. However, as is still the case with computers, there was a glitch, and as a result a poor rancher in Wyoming received 12,634 letters appealing to him to subscribe to *Time Magazine*. The surprised rancher, who didn't ordinarily get much mail, opened the mail-bags and started reading the letters. After reading a few dozen, he sent in a \$6 check for a subscription with a note that said, "I give up!" That's the kind of persuasion that's hard to resist! God's love for you is so powerful that it is hard to resist it!

4. GOD IS JUST

After telling the story, Jesus asked the Jewish mafia what the owner should do to those wicked tenants who killed His son. They puffed out their chests and said with self-righteous indignation, "He shall bring those wretches to a wretched end." With that answer they were pronouncing their own judgment. Within forty years that beautiful Jewish Temple and the magnificent city of Jerusalem would be smoldering in ashes at the hands of the Roman army. I call that a wretched end.

God is love, and God is patient. He is slow to anger and quick to forgive. His mercies endure forever, but none of those attributes cancel that fact that God is just. That means He will mete out perfect justice in the end. So what is the lesson for us?

Lesson: If I reject God's Son/Stone I will fall under His judgment

As Jesus finished this parable He asked the religious leaders, "Have you never read, 'the stone which the builders rejected shall become the capstone: the Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes?'" Jesus was quoting from Psalm 118. Some translations say "cornerstone," and in Ephesians 2:20 Jesus is called the chief cornerstone. But a cornerstone is not the same as a capstone. A cornerstone is used for a foundation. It's the first stone laid and it determines the alignment of all the other stones, but a capstone is the last stone laid. We often call it a keystone.

The "stone which the builders rejected" is a reference to the building of Solomon's Temple. It took over 30,000 workmen over seven years to complete the first temple. According to 1 Kings 6 all the stones were quarried far away from the building site, so there was no sound of hammering heard on the holy hill. Jewish tradition says in the early days of construction the chief builder saw a large stone with an unusual shape rolled on logs into the construction site. The stone was neither square nor rectangular. Because it was cut in an odd shape, he thought it was flawed. He had the workers roll it down the side of the hill into the Kidron Valley where it lay untouched and unnoticed for years.

As he neared the completion of the Temple, the chief builder sent word to the quarry that he was ready for the main capstone to finish the arch marking the entrance to the Temple of God. The quarry master came and reported, "Why, I had that capstone delivered years ago." When they began to search, they discovered the discarded stone in the valley was the capstone. It was covered with debris and dirt. It took many men to raise the massive stone out of the valley. When they raised it and set it, it fit perfectly! The capstone was the very stone they had rejected! What a parable about Jesus!

Just last Friday I stood on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea looking at the remains of a Roman aqueduct that supplied fresh water to Caesarea two thousand years ago. This is a raised stone channel about 15 feet high supported by hundreds of stone arches. I was standing there with Kyle Johns, a local homebuilder who was on our trip. I asked Kyle if he knew how those stone arches could stand with no support from underneath. He nodded and correctly pointed to the center stone in the arch shaped like a wedge. This is called the keystone. They would build the arch supported underneath with wood, and then place that keystone in the top center. The keystone exerted pressure outward and downward and the arch stood perfectly without any support. It's a good system because those Roman arches are still standing after two thousand years. If you removed the keystone the arch would crumble. Jesus is the capstone who can give strength to your life, but without Him, you will crumble.

Because the nation of Israel rejected God's Son, God's stone, they fell under God's judgment. And if you insist on rejecting God's Son, God's Stone, you will face the justice of God as well.

This stone can either be the source of your life or the cause of your suffering. Jesus said, "He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."
(Matthew 21:44)

CONCLUSION

Back when the Old West was being settled, pioneers flocked across the country to California and Oregon. In one particular spot on the Eastern slopes of the Rockies there was a large, dirt covered rock protruding in the middle of the trail. Wagon wheels were broken on it and men tripped over it. Finally someone dug up the odd stone and rolled it off trail into a nearby stream. The stream was too wide to jump over, but people used the stone as a step to cross the cold creek. It was used for years, until finally one settler built his cabin near the stream. He moved the odd stone out of the stream and placed it in his cabin to serve as a doorstep.

As years passed, railroads were built and towns sprang up. The old settler's grandson went East to study geology. On a visit to his grandfather's cabin, the grandson happened to examine the old lump of stone and discovered within that lump of dirt and rock was the largest pure gold nugget ever discovered on the Eastern slope of the Rockies. It had been there for three generations, and people never recognized its value. To some it was a stumbling stone to be removed. To others it was a stepping-stone, and to others it was just a heavy rock. But only the grandson saw it for what it really was—a lump of pure gold.

Jesus is the precious rock God has given us to be the both the cornerstone and the capstone of our lives. Will you come to the rock today? Will you build your life upon Him? One day, you will discover Jesus will either be a stepping-stone that gives you access to God, or He will be a rock over which you stumble...so close and yet so far. The choice is yours.

So what are our take-away truths? First, have you acknowledged God's claim to your life? Have you accepted His Son? Is your life build upon the Rock of Ages?

Second, are you being a good steward of the vineyard where God has placed you? Do you constantly remember that you don't own anything, that He owns it all and He has the right to it all? Will you adopt a sharecropper's attitude when it comes to your possessions?

We are entering God's vineyard when we walk out these doors. Let's go and be faithful sharecroppers for the Lord!

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes



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