

The Other Side of Judgment

CPR 5, 2

Luke 20:9-19 9 He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. 10 At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. 12 He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. 13 "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.' 14 "But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' 15 So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!" 17 Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone'? 18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." 19 The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people. (NIV)

Many things in this life have two sides: a **coin** can be heads or tails. **Team sporting events** always have two opposing teams, and you usually prefer one over the other. **There are two sides** in an argument. The **political scene** in this country, for the most part, has two sides. I have some pictures I took last year at the **Nasher Museum** in Dallas. If you look at this first picture (sideways), it looks like some people walking across a bridge. **But if I show** it to you oriented as it actually is, you see that it is people walking up toward the sky! Your perspective makes all the difference.

I read an article about the **Lincoln Memorial** in Washington DC. The author said that if you look at statue from one angle, the face of our 16th president looks downcast and sad, as if he is considering the terrible consequences of the war that tore his country apart and cost the lives of over 600,000 people. However, from another angle, there appears to be a slight smile on President Lincoln's face, as if he were considering the freedom so many people gained and that his nation was no longer divided but united and stronger than ever. Two different views, two perspectives on the same thing.

This is the third week now we've been looking at parables. The parable that will guide our thoughts today is one that has two sides to it. On the one hand, we hear a severe word of judgment against those who reject God's Grace. This is spoken against God's chosen people of Israel, and in particular their religious leaders. Even though God was patient with them, they continued to spurn and reject His grace. Let's identify all of the characters in this parable:

Owner of Vineyard = God the Father, the Creator and owner of everything.

Tenants = God's Chosen people of Israel.

Servants sent to Tenants = Prophets that God sent to call to repentance

Son = The only begotten Son of the Father

“others” (v. 16) = Gentiles, Non-Jewish

The tenant farmers were expected to provide a crop. The Greek name for these people literally means “workers of the land.” Their agreement with the owner was that they would work the land and give a portion of the crop to the owner. But they became greedy. They began to think they didn't owe the owner anything, and wanted to keep it all to themselves. The owner patiently sent his servants, the prophets, to remind them of His grace and goodness to them, and, in turn, their responsibility to Him. They should recognize how good the Owner had been to them and willingly respond in gratitude with the fruits He expected and deserved. But they would not. Instead, they treated those prophets shamefully and sent them away.

As an ultimate act of love and patience, the Owner sent His Son, hoping the wicked tenants would turn from their evil, repent, and listen to Him. But they treated the Son even worse than all the prophets. Not only did they reject His message, but they determined to kill the Father's heir. Jewish tradition said that a piece of property unclaimed by an heir would be considered ownerless and could be claimed by the tenants. The religious leaders saw Jesus as a threat to their stronghold on the lives of the people. With Jesus out of way, the religious rulers thought the nation would be all theirs. So they saw to it that He was put to death. The Owner was less than happy about all this. The parable says His patience will come to an end. He will destroy those wicked tenants and give the vineyard to others.

It is so easy for us to see how terrible the Jews, the tenants in this parable, were. They rejected the prophets and failed to listen to God. Why is it, then, that we have such a hard time seeing the same kind of behavior in our own lives for what it really is? We also reject the Creator's ownership. We try to lay claim to what is not ours: our life, our time, talents and treasures He has entrusted to us. We live and act as though they are our own, and we owe God nothing. Then, when God graciously calls us to repent through the Word and the invitation of the Sacraments, we reject that call. We ignore the covenant He made with us in Baptism. We neglect Worship,

the study of His Word, private time alone with God in His Word and in prayer. We fail to bring forth the fruit of our faith that our Owner expects and deserves.

However, as I said at the beginning, there are two sides to this parable. So far, all we have been looking at is one side of judgment, all you have been hearing is the harsh consequences of rejecting God's grace. We get another view altogether when we put the **cross** into the picture. When we look at this parable through the cross, we see the other side of judgment. It shows us what God makes possible through His grace in Jesus Christ. We see that we, by God's grace through our faith in Jesus, are the "others" to whom God has given the vineyard.

At the conclusion of this parable, Jesus quotes **Psalm 118:22: *The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone***, or "has become the Chief Cornerstone." The rejection of the stone was the killing of Christ. The religious leaders didn't see any worth or value in the message of Jesus, so they rejected Him and tried to silence His message by putting Him to death. That death was all part of God's plan. In that death Jesus incurred God's full judgment against sin on our behalf. And the Owner then proclaimed Jesus to be the essential building block for the entire kingdom by raising Him from the dead. ***The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.*** The crucified and resurrected Jesus is indeed the keystone of our faith. The one who gives us new life leads us to fruitful labor in His vineyard. We want to give the owner what He expects and deserves. God's grace is what led us to believe in Jesus. It is that same grace that empowers us to be good tenants.

Last Sunday's Epistle reading from 1 Corinthians said: ***the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.*** (1 Cor. 1:18) That message of the cross truly is foolishness to most of the world around us. They don't get it. And even some in the church fail to grasp its meaning. Every couple of years I run across an article about a church that has decided not to use the cross as a symbol because it is too negative – after all, it was an instrument of death. **But that is precisely the point!** Yes, the cross was an instrument of death, a terrible death that Jesus died, the death you deserve. He took your punishment and gives you His perfection, which allows you to stand before God! It remains foolishness to those perishing, but not to us who have been saved through faith in Christ.

If we keep the cross in the picture, looking at things from the other side of judgment, we will be the opposite of those tenants in parable. We will be humbly aware of God's ownership of everything, including our very lives. With the cross in the picture as a reminder of what God did for us there, we will be aware of His grace toward us. With the cross in the picture, we will be more receptive to His Word, clinging to the Son in faith, bearing fruit to His glory. Our faith will be evident in the way we treat our neighbors. It will show in the language we use and in the language we don't use. We will bear fruit in the way we spend our money and our time. With the cross in the picture, our lives will be lived for Jesus. We need to view everything from the perspective of the cross of Jesus Christ.

This parable describes a terrible, unnecessary picture for those who reject God's grace. However, the view from the cross is different. That means our view is different, because of our faith in the one who suffered and died for us there. Jesus bore that terrible judgment described here for us. All we see from the other side of judgment is God's rich grace which has brought us into the vineyard now and forever.