

As he finishes up his explanation and application of the parable and moves on to his next one, *The Parable of the Wedding Banquet*, which will be our focus next week, Jesus changes the picture ever so slightly and says, **"Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."** Some thirty years earlier, standing in the temple in Jerusalem and holding the baby Jesus in his arms, Simeon expressed the same thing this way: **"This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed"** (Lk 2:34, 35). Jesus is the One by whom all people stand or fall. We can divide all humanity into two separate and distinct groups—those who trust Jesus and those who do not, those who love Jesus and those who do not. On Judgment Day, we will stand in one of two camps: either with the sheep on Jesus' right, clothed in his blood and righteousness, and he will be our Savior, or with the goats on his left, spiritually naked and exposed, alone and ashamed, and he will be our Judge. Have mercy on us, dear Father, and move us to repent, believe, and be saved!

As we come to the end of the message today, we have to shake our heads in utter amazement—not so much at the arrogance and stubbornness of the human heart—we're all too familiar with that—but at the patient love of our heavenly Father, a Father who was willing to send his Son into the world, to the cross, and to hell to save us. That's the part that really staggers the imagination. It was the Father who threw his own Son out of the vineyard, wasn't it? How absurd is that! Jesus was carrying our sin, in fact, he was our sin, as his body was stretched out on the cross and nailed to it. God looked down at Jesus, at your sin and my sin, and punished him in our place. And then, three days later, he brought him back from the dead as the guarantee that our sins have been forgiven. **"He was delivered over to death for our sins,"** Paul writes, **"and was raised again for our justification"** (Ro 4:25). In other words, Jesus' death paid for our sins; his resurrection proves it.

God permissive? Not so much. God patient, persistent, persevering, even to the point of being absurd? Every day and in every way. My dear friends, **"be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God"** (2 Cor 5:21). Marvel at the absolute absurdity of the patience of your God. Amen.

Matthew 21:33-46 – 531, 398, 329 – St. Paul's, Muskego, WI
10/18/20 – *Unexpected: Permissive?* – Pastor David M. Kuehl

The parable of our text vividly illustrates the detestable way that the Jewish leaders treated God's Old Testament prophets and, ultimately, God himself in the person of his Son Jesus. Matthew tells us, **"When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parable, they knew he was talking about them."** By the way they responded to Jesus' hard question about what would happen to the tenants when the owner of the vineyard returned, these Jewish officials showed their hand and condemned themselves. They recognized that Jesus' harsh, scathing words were aimed directly at them. But then Jesus takes things a step further by quoting from Psalm 118 to show them that they were also foolish builders who, by rejecting him as the Chief cornerstone and Messiah, would be broken into pieces and crushed by him.

Jesus' point is that, while God is incredibly patient (permissive, in the opinion of some), he will finally destroy in hell those who stubbornly refuse to acknowledge him as their Savior-God and refuse to bring him the fruits of repentance and faith. My goal today is to help you see that God wants you and me, who are the modern-day tenants in his vineyard, to heed his call to repent, believe, and be saved. The only way for us to reach this goal is if we learn to marvel at and appreciate:

The Absolute Absurdity of God's Patience

"Listen to another parable," Jesus says. He's just told *The Parable of the Two Sons*, which we heard last week, and which caused us to marvel at the consistency of God's grace. Now Jesus goes on, **"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."**

A landowner moves away and entrusts his property to others to manage while he's gone. It's a familiar setting for many of Jesus' parables, isn't it? Certainly, Jesus is reminding us that God is the owner of the vineyard. **"The earth is the LORD's and everything in it,"** the psalmist writes, **"the world and all who live in it"** (Ps 24:1). God is the owner of everything we possess; we've simply been entrusted with the management of what is his. We are the tenants, the farmers, in his vineyard.

Jesus continues the parable: **"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."**

The owner asks for a portion of the harvest. Certainly, as the owner, as the one who has planted the vineyard, he has every right to do so. There's nothing unusual about this. But the tenants, the caretakers, react in a most despicable way. Not only do they refuse to give the owner what rightfully belongs to him, they malign, they mistreat, and they murder the messengers.

At this point, we may be feeling a bit uncomfortable with Jesus' words. Remember, I've already stated that we're the modern-day tenants in God's vineyard. I, for one, don't like being identified with these guys. They're embezzlers, they're arrogant, they're cruel, they're violent. I mean, do I have to say more? But before we dismiss this part of the parable and move on, thinking that Jesus must be talking about somebody else, namely, the Jewish leaders who rejected him, let's take a long, hard look into the mirror of God's law. For it is only when we do so that we'll begin to understand the parable and see how it applies to us.

Do we sometimes—perhaps often—view the things that God has graciously entrusted to us as *our* property, belonging to *us*, to do with as *we* see fit, ignoring God's instructions as to how we are to use what he's given us, that is, to his glory and for the good of others? When someone pays us a compliment, do we blush with pride, as if the credit for what we have or what we've done belongs to us? Do we at times find ourselves resenting the claims that others make on *our* time, *our* money, *our* resources? Do we ever puff out our chest and have that *look-and-see-what-my-hands-have-done* kind of attitude? Sure, we do. That's the way our sinful nature behaves. And if we deny it, we're lying both to ourselves and to God.

That's what these farmers are doing. They're acting selfishly, claiming everything as their own: their ability to work, the fruit of their labors, even the vineyard itself. Can't we just hear them boasting, "Ah, what good wine we've made! It's so tasty!"

Now notice the response of the landowner. It's so important that we do. No matter how selfish the tenants' attitude, no matter how despicable and distasteful their actions, in what may seem to be the epitome of permissiveness, the owner keeps trying to win them back. That's God. That's our heavenly Father! What a patient, what a longsuffering (I love that KJV word!), God we have!

"Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said." At this point, Jesus' parable borders on the absurd. My goodness! The owner has already displayed far more patience and "permissiveness" than any person in his right mind would do. The attitude of the tenant farmers has been arrogant and their actions atrocious. They've disregarded, disrespected, and dishonored the owner. Wouldn't we expect him to let them have it, to lower the boom, to send in the troops, so to speak? Our sense of right and wrong, our desire to see justice prevail, wants the owner to unleash his wrath on these guys, to prove once and for all that they're way out of line. But he doesn't. "I'll send my son," he says, "my dearly loved son. Surely they'll listen to him."

Now our minds are spinning out of control. What father, what dad, would send his son to tenants like these, guys who've already displayed such hatred and cruelty? Which is exactly the point. The absurdity is intentional, for it's a picture of the absolute absurdity of God's amazing grace, his incomprehensible mercy, his totally undeserved love for us sinners. **"For God demonstrates his own love for us in this:"** Paul writes, **"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro 5:8).**

"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and take his inheritance.' So, they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him." I can picture Jesus pausing for an indefinite period of time, and then, looking these Jews in the eye, asking them, **"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.'"**

The questions beg asking: Do these tenants really think they're going to get away with it? Do they really disrespect the owner that much? Are they so clueless that they don't understand that he's going to come back and deal harshly with them, at the very least, take the vineyard away from them and give it to someone else?

Remember how I began this sermon. **"When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parable, they knew he was talking about them."** This parable, then, is the most strongly worded warning Jesus can issue to them. It's the red flag of divine caution flying at full mast: "Guys, you're not going to get away with it. Repent, turn from your evil ways, see the light, and be saved."

Dear friends, what was true of the Jewish leaders in Jesus' day is also true of all impenitent sinners today, who imagine that they'll get away with it, that they can continue in their sinful ways and escape a final judgment, that they can somehow pull the wool over God's eyes. But they ignore or deliberately forget what God says through the Apostle Paul: **"Do not be deceived; God cannot be mocked" (Ga 6:7).**

We need to be careful that sin isn't crouching at our door; that we don't go about our lives, thinking that sin doesn't have dire consequences; that we can live the way we want and get around to repenting later on. When God's messengers open our eyes to the sin in our lives—whether subtle or blatant, whether sins of omission or sins of commission—we need to remember that God is always seeking repentance. He's always looking for fruit, the fruit of sorrow over our sin and faith in Jesus as our only Savior from sin. As we confess our sin before him, he invites us to find our refuge in the blood of Jesus, for **"the blood of Jesus, [God's] Son, purifies us from all sin" (1 Jn 1:7).**

Jesus now asks the Jewish leaders a question: **"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'?"** And, before they can answer, he goes on, **"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."** As he so often did, Jesus quotes an Old Testament passage to rebuke and correct his enemies. He applies a verse from Psalm 118 to himself: **"The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone."** Jesus was rejected by the Pharisees and teachers of the law—the builders in God's Church—because he didn't meet their expectations as to what the Messiah was to be and do. Jesus is the Cornerstone, the Rock on which God's Church is built; it is he who gives us our purpose and direction in life.