

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

LUKE 20

⁹He began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, leased it to some tenant farmers, and went away on a journey for a long time. ¹⁰When it was the right time, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect his share of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenant farmers beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹The man went ahead and sent yet another servant, but they also beat him, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. ¹²He then sent yet a third. They also wounded him and threw him out. ¹³The owner of the vineyard said, ‘What should I do? I will send my son, whom I love. Perhaps they will respect him.’

¹⁴“But when the tenant farmers saw him, they talked it over with one another. They said, ‘This is the heir. Let’s kill him, so that the inheritance will be ours.’ ¹⁵They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. So what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶He will come and destroy those tenant farmers and give the vineyard to others.”

When they heard this, they said, “May it never be!”

¹⁷But he looked at them and said, “Then what about this that is written:

‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?’

¹⁸“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush the one on whom it falls.”

¹⁹That very hour the chief priests and the experts in the law began looking for a way to lay hands on him, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.



Thirty-days, 60-days, and 90-days – that was how I learned to classify people as a bill collector during my seminary days. It was a cold-blooded task sometimes. I had a headset and I would phone people with a click of the computer mouse. Then I was instructed not to identify myself until I was speaking to the buyer. Then I was supposed to inquire why the payment was past due. It was good practice for talking to people over the phone, even angry people, but at times it felt merciless. Sometimes the contracts we collected on were made by dishonest dealers with unsuspecting elderly, weak, or sick on a fixed income or no income at all. Who were the bad dealers? We could only find that out through experience, through how they made the contract, basically through the grapevine.

But we have learned through the grapevine of many messengers how good of a deal we have it. As the time drew closer for Jesus to suffer and die, He told the people a parable in the presence of some teachers and priests. A man planted a beautiful vineyard, rented it to some tenant farmers, and went away for a long time. This was a nice contract, a good deal for the tenant farmers. After all, theirs was a sincere Landowner, since the Lord of the vineyard stood for our loving Father.

But the man in the parable expected fruit. The Lord of the vineyard has always had the right to receive fruit from the workers in His vineyard. He had the right to expect tithes and sacrifices and special gifts from His Old Testament people. He has the right to ask for first-fruits of all that His New Testament people bring in. ***But what He wants most of all, what He truly deserves and prizes, is the produce of a heart that belongs entirely to Him.***

For those hearts who withhold the produce, today Jesus offers:

God's Grace Through The Grapevine

I. Grace of God's Word

Have you ever visited wine country? We had a beautiful view after a wedding in Defiance, Missouri, for the eclipse last year. What a treat for your eyes, nose, and taste buds! Wine country: terraces and rows of vines as far as the eye can see; big juicy grapes hanging from vibrant green canopy; elegant structures built for touring and tasting the fermented fruit. You can imagine the vineyard's richness.

How generous the Lord of the vineyard was! He provided tenant farmers with a beautiful place to live, a satisfying purpose in work, and time to accomplish it. But they took advantage of it.

Now, most of us have heard the saying, "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me." This is how the saying goes. When we notice the Lord of the vineyard sending one delegation after another only to keep receiving a handful of nothing and a hurting helper in return, we might be tempted to wonder what he was thinking. Shouldn't the Lord of the vineyard have dispatched the police with warrants instead of servants with words?

Yet this is what the Lord did throughout the entire Old Testament. He sent His servant Moses to grumbling, rebellious people, in order to lead them out of Egypt and through the wilderness to the Promised Land. When wicked Queen Jezebel was murdering the prophets, God sent Elijah to oppose her and call Israel to repent. When Jeremiah was beaten and placed in the stocks and dropped into a muddy well, God continued to use His prophet to name the sin and turn Israel's heart to the Lord.

How could the Lord keep sending servants if He knew they would be mistreated? It's because the ***Lord of the vineyard is abundantly patient.*** He did not want His people to be evicted. He did not want to put His people into chains. He did not want them to perish in their sins. He wanted every one of them to turn from their ways and live. So He kept sending servants to call for fruit.

How has the Lord of the vineyard shown patience to you? Perhaps there were years of your life that you wanted nothing to do with His messengers. Perhaps there were seasons you spent living in outright defiance of His will. Everyone has their own individual struggles with sin from day to day. Yet rather than send you away in disgrace, the Lord sends servants to you in patience. These servants are in your everyday, real life. These servants are echoes of prophets in days past. They are the law of God, discovered so clearly in the Bible. They call for you to give up your wickedness. Through servants God beckons and extends His gospel—give Him the fruit of your heart; that is, a heart that trusts in the loving Word of His Son.

II. Grace of God's Son

When it seems that the Landlord's patience has stretched too thin already, what's this? How could He send His own beloved Son to them? How could He still expect anything good from those awful tenants? ***It sounds downright foolish to us.***

And it sounded foolish to the people listening to the parable. We learn through Matthew that some of Jesus' audience called it out, "The Lord of the vineyard should bring His might and men and have the tenants killed and cut to pieces!" Then it seems that Jesus affirmed that judgment. Finally the crowd called out, "May it never be!"

Yet God sent His own Son anyway. Anyone could see that the beloved son of the Landlord was the only-begotten, beloved Son of God. He knew, lived, and breathed God's will without fault or flaw. He

was there for the fruit of the Jewish leaders. So they had Jesus, the Lord's own Son, disgracefully dragged out of the city of David, brutally nailed to a cross, and viciously killed. They mistakenly thought that through this they would inherit what rightfully belonged to the Son.

How could God allow this to happen? What seems like God's foolishness to us is actually wiser than any of our wisdom. Those Jewish leaders intended to harm the Son, but God intended it for good, to accomplish what has now been done, the saving of many lives. ***The death of His own Son was part of God's plan to reconcile the world to Himself*** in Christ, not counting men's sins against them.

But it was not merely because of the Jewish leaders that the Son of God was murdered. It was because of us and our sin that Jesus died. We share in the blame. We also share in the benefit. It was for us that He died. It is His ways that are higher than ours.

Cory was a young Christian lady with many friends at school. And Cory loved to tell the story of Jesus Christ her Lord, because she knew it was true. Day after day Cory's friends would listen to all the Christian things she had to tell them. She wore her faith on her sleeve and shared God's Word in its truth and purity. One day, after Cory had become an adult, she ran into one of those old friends. Cory immediately frowned because she had heard through the grapevine that this old friend of hers had become pregnant out of wedlock and had a child. But her friend was unfazed. "Cory, I am so glad we ran into each other. It is because of everything you used to say that we have this little baby. My boyfriend's family wanted us to have an abortion, but I remembered how important life was to you and how important and precious life is. Thank you." Cory stopped frowning. She smiled. This was a relationship she could work on, because ***her friend was listening more than Cory knew.***

III. Grace while there is still time

So why would Jesus leave us with this grim picture today? It was so that they would listen. The Son came to offer peace and life and hope, but the Lord of the vineyard will come with vengeance on His enemies. The Lord forgives many things. He forgave tax collectors and criminals, prostitutes and persecutors, deniers and doubters. ***But the one thing He does not and will not tolerate is the outright rejection of His Son.*** The Lord will come and bring total loss and ultimate death to those who throw the Son out of their hearts. Let us not ignore the Savior and hold onto the sins He longed to save us from, or we will be caught in His hands. And it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Jesus leaves us with this grim picture because He wants to remind us that we ought to have a healthy fear of the Lord. He doesn't want to scare His people, but to sober us. He spoke this parable to Jews and their leaders who had not yet called for His crucifixion, who were still living, and who still had time to repent of their sins. Now He is speaking to you while there is still time. Use every day to embrace the Son who has come to you by the Spirit in Word and sacrament. Use every day to throw your old self out and put on the new creation in Christ. Use every day to put your sinful nature to death and remember the new life you have in baptism.

Yes, may this parable never be us! May we never take God's blessings for granted. May we never mistreat His messengers disgracefully. May we never become the objects of God's vengeance.

May we be among those who rejoiced as Jesus rode into Jerusalem. May we be among those who sit as guests at His table and eat and drink His life-giving body and blood. May we be among those who watched as Jesus carried our sin to the cross and took the Father's full vengeance in our place. May we be among those who gather in wonder at His empty tomb. May we always be among those who listened to this warning from the Lord of the vineyard. ***May we be among His children whom He spares by faith and brings into the paradise of heaven.*** This parable truly was sincere, offering God's grace through the grapevine. Amen.