

Lent 5
March 13, 2016

"The Stone the Builders Rejected"

LUKE 20:9-19

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.

"The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone and it is marvelous in our eyes." We sang these words from Psalm 118. They provide us with a powerful picture of how our God builds this magnificent arch of salvation and then puts the capstone or keystone into place to fit it all together. That happened when our heavenly Father raised his Son to life after he did everything necessary to rescue us from our sin. Jesus quoted these words to Jewish leaders a few days before he died, because he wanted them to realize how they had rejected him as the keystone in God's whole plan for saving them and rescuing them.

All of us are born into this world with a sinful nature that looks up and rejects this completed work of Christ in his death and resurrection. It is in our DNA to say: "This is too good to be true. I must have to contribute something toward saving myself and completing this magnificent arch of salvation."

Oh how the people shook their heads in disgust as they watched Jesus dying on the cross. I could still be shaking my head in disgust and disdain if it were not for the grace of God that turned me away from rejecting Jesus and turned me to believing he has done everything to save me. Think of all the people you know who don't care much about Jesus doing everything necessary to save them from everlasting punishment.

This morning we want to take a closer look at Jesus as he reaches out to the Jewish leaders to turn their hearts to him. He told a story about a landowner, a vineyard and tenant farmers to help these people see how they were rejecting him. He wanted them to see that they are the builders who were rejecting him as the capstone or keystone of

their salvation.

The story about rejection

Jesus was such a good story teller. "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.'" In Matthew's account of this story, the landowner plants a vineyard, puts a wall around it, carves out a winepress in the solid rock, and even puts up a watch tower to protect it from thieves who would steal the grapes when they get ripe. The landowner spared no cost and no effort to have a vineyard that would excel at producing the best grapes for the best possible wine.

When you read the Old Testament you realize you are reading the account of God's vineyard. He worked with his people and gave them every blessing possible to have them produce the best fruit in the whole world. This was the fruit of believing in the Messiah and what he would do to save them. We think of the words about a vineyard in Isaiah 5 where it says, "My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a wine press as well. He looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit." God worked so patiently with his people, but they bore only bad fruit. How often they disappointed him by turning to Baal and other false gods. How often Jesus worked with people to point them to himself as their Savior and he met with the bad fruit of rejection and unbelief!

To shock these Jewish leaders into seeing how they were rejecting God's plan to save them, Jesus told a story about these nasty farmers who hated and despised the owner of the vineyard. The owner of the vineyard rented out the beautiful vineyard to some farmers. The plan was to have them work the vineyard and then they could share in the grapes that were harvested. We did that on the family farm. My father would contract with someone who had a field of hay. We cut the hay and baled. For our work we received half the hay.

Now it is time for the harvest. The owner of the vineyard sends one of his servants to collect his part of the fruit that was harvested. What do these nasty farmers do? The tenant farmers beat him and sent him away empty handed. You would think the owner would get some tough guys to go with him and beat up the farmers. Instead the owner sends another servant. They beat him and treated him shamefully. He sends yet another servant and they wounded him and threw him out. Finally he sends his son whom he loved dearly with the hope they would respect him. They are so bad and so nasty and so twisted in their thinking, they kill the son with the hope that they can take over the beautiful vineyard and make it their own.

Who were these guys? Who were these nasty, evil, bad farmers who would do such a terrible thing? You know who they were. They were God's chosen people who were given a beautiful temple that had sacrifices which pointed to Jesus sacrifice on the cross. They were God's chosen people who were given prophets such as Isaiah who spoke about a Messiah who would be wounded for their transgressions and bruised for their iniquities. They killed the prophets who came to them to turn their hearts away from Baal to the true God. They killed God's Son whose love for them was unlike anything they could ever see or experience in life.

Listen to what Stephen said to these people before they stoned him to death. "You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears! You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him- you have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

Now Jesus warns these people about the terrible judgment from God that would come to them if they did not repent. Jesus asks the question, "What will the owner of the vineyard do?" Then he answer the question with these words, "He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." The Jewish leaders and the people listening to these words cannot bear the thought of such a terrible judgment so they say rather vehemently, "May this never be!"

In a few short days these people would join together to have Jesus, God's own beloved Son, put to death. They would call for their blood to be on them and their children. And how would Jesus respond to this terrible treatment? As they were nailing him to the cross he would pray for them, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing." As they mocked him while he was on the cross, he had nothing but the deepest love and compassion for these people. That's why he told this story of the nasty farmers because he wanted them to put themselves in this story and realize what would happen to them if they rejected him as their Savior.

Easter Sunday is only two weeks away. Christians in our community and throughout our country and throughout the world will be inviting their friends and neighbors and family members to come and join in the celebration of Jesus' victory over sin and death. Will all the people in my neighborhood be attending worship on that day? For most it will be just another Sunday, except for special candy and maybe even gifts from the Easter bunny. What is true of my neighborhood is probably true also of yours. What never ceases to amaze me is that Jesus would depend on people like you and me to call people to open their eyes to see what our Savior has done for them and not reject their only hope of being saved.

The stone that was rejected

So what is so terrible and awful about Jesus that so many want nothing to do with him. Jesus gives us the answer to that question by quoting from Psalm 118 and showing us how the capstone is rejected. "Then 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'? Everyone who calls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.'"

See the arch as it is being built. Every single stone is carefully cut and shaped and put into place. As the arch gets closer and closer to completion it needs to be supported with wooden braces to keep from falling. Each stone in the arch leans in to the center more and more, until you get to the very top and then the keystone is put into place. That keystone needs to be perfectly cut and shaped. When the bracing is removed, the arch does not collapse because the weight falls in on itself and distributes the weight to the very bottom

of the arch. Such arches, built without mortar, can last for thousands of years.

So it is with Jesus. He is the capstone the builders rejected. Our heavenly Father carefully planned to have Jesus punished in our place for our sin. Everything is carefully planned out and executed. Jesus will go to the cross and take the sin of the world upon himself. He will be punished for that sin and pay for it completely. When the work is done our Heavenly will raise him to life again. That is the glory Jesus prayed for when he said, "Father glorify me that I may glorify you."

I have nothing to contribute to the building of that arch of salvation. It is all about Jesus and what he has done. Psalm 118 says "It is marvelous in our eyes." I am holding in my hand a hammer and a chisel. I would not do very well trying to shape a stone to be used in an arch. I am much worse at doing anything to get rid of sin my life. My best efforts will only result in failure. You have heard it said, "If sounds too good to be true, it is probably not true." That applies to lots of things in life, but not to what our God has done to save us and rescue us. He has carefully done everything necessary to totally remove your problem of sin. He has done everything necessary to give you new life now and on into all eternity. He will work in your life and mine so this amazing arch of salvation is always marvelous in our ours. That is why he told us this story of the nasty farmers. Because of Jesus we can say with the Apostle Paul, "Nothing in all creation will ever separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Amen.