

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.

Beware a false sense of entitlement!

What would you do if you rented out a house or an apartment to some tenants and they did not respect you or listen to your requests? What would you do if they refused to pay rent and acted like *they* owned the place? What if you sent an employee or even a family member over to collect what was rightfully yours and you found out that these tenants had abused your representative, hurt them, and sent them away empty handed? There would only be one thing to do. You would have to get rid of them, take the property away from them, and start looking for another renter.

In our lesson for today, Jesus delivers strong words of warning for the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They had become infected by a false sense of entitlement and had become swollen with pride. They wanted to call the shots. They wanted to run the show. They acted like they owed the place and they alone had the keys of the kingdom of God. Jesus urged them to put aside their pride and truly listen to God's Word. He warned them if they would continue to reject God one day God would have to reject them and take away the Word of God and punish them for their unbelief. Jesus was harsh with these leaders, but he had to be. If they were not going to listen to him, if they were not going to repent of their sin and produce fruits of faith, there was only one thing for God to do.

This event most likely transpired on the Tuesday of Holy Week. While Jesus was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to Jesus and challenged his authority. ***"Tell us by what authority you are doing these things," they said. "Who gave you this authority?"*** Jesus wasn't rattled at all by their rude and sudden interruption. Instead he asked them a question in return. ***"John's baptism – was it from heaven, or from men?"***

Unwilling to concede that John was a prophet and unwilling to believe that Jesus was the Son of God they said that they did not know. These leaders had come up to Jesus and basically demanded, “Who do you think you are?” and without flinching, Jesus came right back with a response that challenged them with the same question. “Who do you think you are?” With this question about John he challenged them as if to say, “You don’t listen to God, you don’t listen to his prophets. You didn’t listen to John, you are rejecting me.” “And yet you claim that you are in the right and I am in the wrong!” “What gives you the right to this false sense of entitlement?”

To expound on that point Jesus went on to tell this parable of the wicked tenants. A certain man planted a vineyard, hired some men to take care of it, and went away for a long time. At harvest time the master returned and sent a servant to retrieve some fruit from his vineyard. Of course this was a reasonable request, this was his land, this was his fruit, but the tenants responded in such an unreasonable way. The tenants beat the servant and sent him back to their master empty handed. This was not their land, but they now believed it was. They had no right to reject and harm the servant that the master had sent, but they now believed that they were in charge.

What ungrateful wretches! What horrible disobedience! Surely the master would punish these wicked tenants. Shockingly the master is unreasonably patient. He sends another servant. However, the master’s patience with the tenants goes unrewarded as they beat and injure this servant and another servant that he would later send. Certainly these wicked tenants have to go! Certainly the master will no longer tolerate such disobedience! This was His land. This was His vineyard. But the master is oh so gracious. In one more act of mercy the master of the vineyard sent his Son ***“I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.”***

They did not. They did not cower in fear of the master’s son. They did not humble themselves before this noble and important individual. But instead, they said, ***“Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.”*** The master poured upon them grace after grace, he had put them on this land, he had charged them with taking care it, and when they refused to listen to him he was patient with them, he gave them more chances than they ever deserved, and how did they respond to all this? How did they respond to the master’s grace and mercy? They plotted to kill the master’s beloved son. Why? They were filled with pride. They didn’t want to give in. They wanted to call the shots. They wanted to keep the land.

How terribly flawed their thinking! How their pride and arrogance had blinded them! How could they expect to keep the land! How could they expect to kill the master’s son and keep on going like nothing happened! Who did they think they were!

The chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders of the people were right in thinking that Jesus was speaking this parable against them. They were the ones who had been filled with a false sense of entitlement. They thought that because they were part of God’s chosen people, because they lived in the Promised Land they were entitled to certain rights. They believed that because they had been placed in position of authority, and because they worked in the temple, they now had the right to call the shots. And so

these leaders of God's chosen people built their religion on the things of the past, their lineage, and their heritage. They put their faith in their prescribed acts of obedience and their rituals of worship. They had it all figured out and no one could tell them differently, not any prophet, not Jesus. They had rejected the prophets who told them to truly listen to the word of God and produce fruits of faith, to believe in the promised spiritual Messiah, and to serve the Lord. And in their pride they thought that Jesus had no right to challenge their authority, so they challenged his. They threatened his life and later they would take it. Who did this Jesus think he was anyway!

How terribly flawed their thinking! How could they expect to kill the son of God and keep on going like nothing happened! They had forced God's hand by their arrogant disobedience and so Jesus warned them of God's coming wrath. The word of God would be taken from his chosen people. God's blessings, his eternal inheritance of heaven, it would all be taken away and be given to the Gentiles instead.

Their terrible loss would be our gain. Unfortunately the true word of the Lord was taken from the Jewish nation. Like a branch broken off an olive tree they were no longer connected to their God of promise, but instead people from every other nation would be grafted in through faith in Christ Jesus.

By God's grace we are part of that connection. We have been connected to Jesus. His word largely rejected in Jerusalem was then taken to the world. The word touched the hearts of our many. It touched our hearts. Dead in sin we are grafted into Jesus. He is the precious root that gives us life. He supports us and enables us to produce fruit and serve our Lord. His sacrifice has saved us. His word guides us. Through his means of grace he has called to be in his kingdom and to serve our Lord and master. And now we stand in him and with him by faith. What privilege! What honor God has bestowed upon us! God has placed us in his kingdom! He has made us workers in his vineyard!

As workers in his vineyard could that same arrogance arise in our hearts? Could that same false sense of entitlement infect our thinking like it did the Jewish leaders? Of course it can. Pride and arrogance are deeply rooted in all of our hearts and minds. God has graciously placed us in his kingdom, but is there not a part of us that overlooks that grace and proudly wants to call the shots?

Filled up with arrogance and pride we too carry on in sinful ways. When our sin is confronted by the very Word of God should we not cower in humility? We should, but too often we don't. When God sends out his word; when he sends a messenger, a pastor, or another member of this congregation to talk to us about sin do we become puffed up with pride and refuse to listen. Instead of listening we proclaim with our words and actions, "I have been a member of this church for so many years, who do you think you are to tell me how to live my life?" In worship we stand out of reverence for the words and works of our Savior, but then we refuse to stand down and submit to God's Son in our personal lives. Even when God's Son calls us to repentance through his word we do not listen. We continue in a particular sin. We continue to gossip, or spread rumors about people in church, or we badmouth those in government that God has placed over us in positions of authority. With blatant disregard for his word we refuse to forgive. We hold grudges. We continue to waste

our blessings on sinful habits. We continue to waste our time in sinful practices. We do not submit to God or listen to his son.

Why? We are infected with arrogance and pride. God has been so gracious to us but we still want to call the shots. We want to have it our way. We ignore our Lord's reasonable request for fruits of faith and repentance, and instead we reject his message. But then we still have the audacity to expect his blessings even when we reject his word. We still have the nerve to claim God's inheritance even when we refuse to listen to his Son. How terribly flawed is our thinking!

This thinking is so prevalent in the world today. There are so many who claim that you can still be in God's kingdom even if Christ and his teachings are not in the center. They teach things like, *God created you. He will bring you to heaven no matter what you do, even if you don't really believe that Jesus is the Son of God or follow his ways. He won't send any one to hell he has an obligation to save you*

Jesus gives us all a much needed dose of reality when he says. ***"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.*** There is a Jewish proverb that carries essentially the same meaning. *If a stone falls on a pot; woe to the pot! If the pot falls on the stone; woe to the pot! Either way, woe to the pot!* If we disregard Jesus we will stumble on that chief corner stone and disaster will follow. If we try to take Jesus out of the most important place in our lives, if we kick him to the side and out of that cornerstone position in our lives or we chisel away at his teachings and ignore his commands our faith crumbles and disaster follows. Either way, woe to those who reject the Savior!

Jesus issued this warning not because he was intimidated by his enemies or afraid that they would kill him. He was the stone referred to in this passage from the psalms he would not be destroyed, but he was concerned that these leaders and then people that followed them would be destroyed forever in hell. This warning was not just for the Jewish people. We need hear this warning too. We are not impervious to the temptations of arrogance. We are not immune the disease of pride. It is dangerous to reject God's Word and to follow our own ways. God is patient with us wicked sinners, but his patience has a limit. God should take his word away and give it to someone else. But he doesn't. In his grace and mercy he is unreasonably patient with us. He forgives us for the times we reject him. He forgives us for the times when we refuse to listen. He is so patient with us.

Out of gratitude for God, let us therefore, listen to our Savior's voice and follow his commands. Let us respect his messengers and listen to the Word they proclaim. Let us serve our gracious God with gratitude. He has saved us through the selfless sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He has called us to faith. He has called us to be his own and serve him in his kingdom. He continues to graciously give us his word. In love he sends us faithful pastors and leaders to rebuke us and guide us, to instruct us and strengthen us. Out of gratitude for all that he does let us make Christ Jesus the center of our lives and let us serve our LORD with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind. Let us gladly bring to him our fruits of faith that are produced in his kingdom. Amen.