

Fifth Sunday in Lent
March 29, 2020
Luke 20:9-19

In Christ Jesus, Who took God's punishment for our sin upon Himself, so that we might be set free, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

According to the church year, this fifth Sunday in Lent is called "Passion Sunday." We are now within two weeks of celebrating our Savior's suffering and death, His "passion," and our text this morning focuses in on the message of Christ's suffering. These words of our sermon text were spoken by Jesus on Tuesday of Holy Week, just three days before His crucifixion. We see that Jesus clearly knew what was going to happen and even warned the Jewish leaders of it but to no avail. So great was their hatred toward Him.

Several truths are revealed in this parable of the wicked vinedressers:

- 1) Servants of the vineyard owner are rejected and beaten by the vinedressers.
- 2) The son of the vineyard owner is rejected and killed by the vinedressers.
- 3) The vineyard is given to other vinedressers to take care of.

The parable is simple and vivid. A man planted a vineyard. He rented it out to vinedressers and then went away to a far country for a long time. At harvest time the owner sent one of his servants to collect the rental fee, a portion of the harvest. The vinedressers though did not pay the rental fee; in fact they beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. The owner sent two more servants and the vinedressers mistreated and beat them also and cast them out. Finally the owner sent his son. He too was taken by the vinedressers, cast out of the vineyard and killed.

In their evil minds they actually thought that they could get away with this murder and get the vineyard for themselves. But what will the owner do? He will come back and take the vineyard away from the evil vinedressers, destroy them and give the vineyard to others to take care of.

At the end of the parable we are told that the chief priests and the scribes knew that Jesus had spoken this parable about them. Yet they were not led to repent, but instead sought all the more to lay hands on Jesus.

Let's take another look at this parable and see the spiritual meaning to it. God the Father is the man who owned and planted the vineyard. The vineyard is the Kingdom of God, His Church. The first vinedressers are the Jewish nation or people, especially the Jewish church leaders. In the Old Testament they were the caretakers of the Church of God, of His Kingdom. The servants who came for the payments, looking for the fruit of the harvest are the Old Testament prophets. The son of the owner, of course is Jesus, the Son of God.

What we first see in this parable is a picture of Old Testament Israel's rejection of God's prophets. God chose Israel as His people. In and through them He would manifest His power, grace and mercy to all of mankind. They were the caretakers of His Word, His Word of Promise concerning the Messiah and the salvation of mankind. The chief priests and scribes were called upon to tend to the Old Testament prophecies, conduct the sacrifices and ceremonies which pointed ahead to the Messiah. But instead they became selfish workers, serving themselves rather than the people.

When the LORD Jehovah sent prophet after prophet warning them of their sinful rebellion, of their unbelief and rejection of Him, they rejected the prophets. Some were stoned, others beaten and still others were put to death. As leaders and religious rulers they did not produce any fruits of repentance and faith. They refused to listen to and obey God, the owner of His Church.

In spite of God's patience with them and in spite of all of His calls to repentance they remained rebellious, stiff-necked and stubborn in their unbelief, yet they thought that they would inherit the kingdom because of their religious offices they held. They misused His gifts and mistreated His prophets. God had already shown unusual patience with these wicked people, but now He does something even more unusual. What human father, who loved his son, would send him to such wicked and cruel people, who had already been so mean to so many? But God the Father who dearly loved His Son sent Him because He also dearly loved His people as well.

How could anyone be so foolish to think that they could get away with such a crime? Could these

tenants really have thought that the owner would do nothing to them? They had mistreated the owner's servants and now they killed his very own son, the heir. Again the thinking of the chief priests and scribes was "we are children of Abraham, this is our destiny to be in God's kingdom no matter what. Kill the Son and the kingdom is ours."

And here is Jesus standing before the very ones who are plotting to do just that. Kill the Son! Jesus couldn't have given them any clearer or stronger warning that He knew what they were planning against Him, yet in their blind hatred they were still determined to go ahead with their wicked plans. Would they get away with it? **NO WAY**, says Jesus.

He even asks those listening to Him, **THEREFORE WHAT WILL THE OWNER OF THE VINEYARD DO TO THEM?** Jesus doesn't wait for an answer. He says, **HE WILL COME AND DESTROY THOSE VINEDRESSERS AND GIVE THE VINEYARD TO OTHERS.** This came to pass almost 40 years after Jesus' crucifixion, in 70 A.D. when the city of Jerusalem was completely overrun and destroyed, the temple was torn down, sacrifices and ceremonies came to an end and the Gospel message of Jesus Christ was ultimately spread to and then spread by the Gentiles.

The people couldn't believe their ears. Certainly this could not, this would not happen! But Jesus then looks directly at His enemies, who in two days would arrest Him and in three days hang Him on the cross, and asked them to explain the meaning to Psalm 118:22: **THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED HAS BECOME THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE.**

Jesus is that Stone. The word for **rejected** means "to discard something after it has been examined and failed to meet the test." Jesus failed to meet the expectations of the Jewish leaders. He was not the kind of Messiah they expected or were looking for, so they rejected Him, they tossed Him aside, crucified Him. But this same rejected, despised and murdered Jesus has become the chief Cornerstone of His Church. God took that discarded Stone and placed it as the Foundation, the Cornerstone of all believers. This is the picture of Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension into heaven where He now rules all things and is the Foundation and the Head of the Church.

The judgment upon those who rejected Jesus is that they will be ground into powder, crushed into dust. What a graphic picture of eternal damnation.

We know that these words were first applied to the people of Jesus' day. But we need to also apply these words of our Savior to ourselves. We see that Jesus is talking about

**GOD'S PUNISHMENT UPON SIN AND UNBELIEF!
IS IT REMOTE OR REAL?**

**I: GOD'S LOVING CALL TO REPENTANCE
MAKES HIS PUNISHMENT SEEM REMOTE!**

Peter writes in his second epistle: **SCOFFERS WILL COME IN THE LAST DAYS, WALKING ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN LUSTS, AND SAYING, "WHERE IS THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING? FOR SINCE THE FATHERS FELL ASLEEP, ALL THINGS CONTINUE AS THEY WERE FROM THE BEGINNING OF CREATION."**

God's time of grace, His loving patience and call to mankind to repent makes His judgment and punishment upon sin and unbelief seem so remote. It is like the owner that has gone away to a far country for many years. You start thinking, "he won't come back. We can do whatever we want, we are safe." Many people think of and speak of God in this same way. "He only sees us from a distance. He is some remote Being somewhere out there, who is really not that concerned with us." His threats of punishment and condemnation upon those who willingly break His commandments, who reject Him and who disregard His Word seem empty. His punishment seems so very far away, even non-existent. So unbelieving man thinks!

Like the unbelieving Jews of the Old Testament and of Jesus' day who did not heed God's loving call to repentance, so also the majority of our world today live their lives as they choose, as they will, as they desire, with little or no thought to God. But that **remote** punishment will some day become **very real**.

The unbelieving Jews experienced it when their city and temple was destroyed and the Gospel was taken away from them. God's patient calling finally came to an end. So will unbelieving mankind experience it. God's patient calling for the unbeliever to repent is rapidly coming to an end, and then His punishment will be very real.

II: THE END TO PATIENT CALLING MAKES HIS PUNISHMENT VERY REAL.

Every unrepentant sinner who refuses to listen to God's Word will have the kingdom of heaven taken away from them and they will be crushed. Jesus is not just talking about those who oppose Him, but also about those who are indifferent to Him. Like a person who carelessly walks through a field, stumbles on a stone, falls and breaks some bones, so shall those who look upon Christ and His salvation with indifference be broken to pieces. But those who intentionally reject Christ and oppose Him will be crushed by that Stone, Jesus Christ. God's judgment through His Son is very real and will come to pass. We are told that then the unbelievers will cry out for the rocks to cover them and for the hills to hide them from the wrath of God, but there will be no escape.

But there is good news even in God's punishment upon sin.

III: GOD'S VERY REAL PUNISHMENT UPON CHRIST MAKES OUR PUNISHMENT OBSOLETE!

When God the Father sent His Son into this world, He willed for Him to die, to suffer and to die as our Substitute. All of the punishment we deserved, Jesus received. The condemnation that we had sored up for ourselves, Jesus took upon Himself. Instead of us being cast out of the vineyard, the kingdom, Christ was cast out and killed for us. Therefore that **very real punishment** that should have fallen upon us because of our sins has instead been placed upon Christ and our punishment therefore is no longer.

That is the beauty of our God and of the message of His love to lost mankind. **MARK IT WELL! LISTEN CAREFULLY!** Many have not and it has cost them eternity. **God's punishment upon sin is not remote, it is real!** For the unrepentant sinner, it is real! For the one who has rejected Christ and His sacrifice, it is real! For the one who is just indifferent to Christ and His work of redemption, it is real! For the work-righteous who believe they can earn their own way into heaven by good works, it is real! For the hypocrite who tries to deceive God with words and actions but has no heart of faith, God's punishment is real!

But for the repentant child of God who looks to Jesus as His Lord and Savior, who believes that Jesus took his place, his punishment is obsolete, it will not happen! To the one who despairs of his own goodness and merit and relies solely upon Christ's merit and sacrifice, God's punishment is obsolete, done away with. **WHY?** Because God's **very real punishment** was placed **upon His Son!**

How sad that Jesus suffered and died, that Jesus endured God's punishment for the sins of the whole world, that Jesus paid the debt we owed, that no one would have to endure the eternal punishment of damnation and yet the majority of the world rejects that Substitute, rejects that Stone. They examine it and toss it aside. For the unbeliever that Stone, Jesus will come back to crush him in the judgment, but for the believer, that Stone, Jesus has become the Cornerstone to His life, the Foundation Stone of His faith, the chief Stone of the New Testament Church. May we ever build our faith and our assurance upon that Rock of Ages, Jesus Christ.

Amen.