

## ENGAGE

This week we are looking at three parables this Sunday found in Luke 20:9-19

- The text is the story of wicked tenants of the Master's vineyard who beat the servants and kills the Master's son thinking that ownership of the vineyard would become theirs by doing so.
- Jesus quotes Psalm 118:2 (the Hosanna Psalm) asking what it means to the listeners.
- I will be addressing the centerpiece of our faith being the cornerstone, Jesus and the mindset and steps we can avoid and take to keep Him as the center of our life.

## EXAMINE

**The parable of the tenant farmers.****1. (9-16a) A parable about a landowner and his tenants.**

Then He began to tell the people this parable: "A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country for a long time. Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the vinedressers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent another servant; and they beat him also, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And again he sent a third; and they wounded him also and cast him out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.' But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.' So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others."

a. A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers: This sort of tenant farming arrangement was a common practice in Jesus' day, especially in Galilee. Archaeologists have discovered records of this same sort of dispute between landowners and tenant farmers.

b. Planted a vineyard: This parable had more than a cultural connection; it was also rooted in the Old Testament. Jesus' first listeners would remember that the vineyard was used in the Old Testament as a picture of Israel (Isaiah 5:1-7). In this parable, the tenants (the vinedressers) represented the religious leaders among the Jewish people.

c. Leased it to vinedressers: The vinedressers didn't buy the vineyard, and they did not make it. They were allowed to work it by a generous owner – yet they turned against the owner, and one day they would answer for their rebellion..

i. This parable tells us that God, the owner of all, that He is more patient with rebels than we would ever be, and that there will be a final day of reckoning.

d. What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: The owner of the vineyard repeatedly tried to receive what was rightfully His from the vineyard and those who worked it. They rejected each

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of the three servants he sent to receive what was due to him, so finally he sent his beloved son, thinking “Probably they will respect him.”

e. This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours: The renters of the vineyard foolishly thought they could benefit from killing the son who had or would inherit the vineyard. They were seriously wrong in this foolish assumption.

i. “Jeremias surmises that the farmers may have assumed from the arrival of the son that the owner had died. So if they killed the sole heir, the vineyard would pass into their hands as first claimants.” (Pate)

ii. “In a day when title was sometimes uncertain, anyone who had had the use of land for three years was presumed to own it in the absence of an alternative claim.” (Morris)

iii. This parable tells us that Jesus knew He was the Son – the Son of God – and that He knew that He would be killed soon.

## 2. (16b-19) Jesus applies the parable.

And when they heard it they said, “Certainly not!” Then He looked at them and said, “What then is this that is written: ‘The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone’? Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people; for they knew He had spoken this parable against them.

a. Certainly not! The religious leaders understood the parable immediately and objected that Jesus compared them to the rebellious and foolish tenants (they knew He had spoken this parable against them). In their blindness they thought, “This could never be us.”

b. The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone: Jesus taught them from Psalm 118, because this Psalm described the coming of the Messiah to Jerusalem, and Jesus had been officially presented to Israel at the Triumphal Entry. The hostility of the Jewish leaders showed that this Messianic stone was being rejected, even if He was initially greeted with hosannas.

i. “Jesus’ connection of the rejected son and the rejected stone seems to suggest that He is explaining the people’s query about the treatment of the son.” (Pate)

c. Stone... chief cornerstone: Jesus is often likened unto a stone or a rock in the Bible. He is the rock of provision that followed Israel in the desert (1 Corinthians 10:4). He is the stone of stumbling (1 Peter 2:8). He is the stone cut without hands that crushes the kingdoms of this world (Daniel 2:45).

i. The cornerstone, “designated in antiquity the stone used at the building’s corner to bear the weight or the stress of the two walls. It would have functioned somewhat like a

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'keystone' or 'capstone' in an arch or other architectural form. It was the stone which was essential or crucial to the whole structure." (Fitzmyer, cited in Pate)

d. Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder: Anyone who comes to Jesus will be broken of their pride and self-will, but those who refuse to come will be crushed by Christ in judgment.

## Messianic Understanding of the Old Testament "Stone" Passages

There are several Old Testament passages that the Jews identified with the Messiah. Daniel's vision is most striking, and attracted considerable Rabbinical comment:

"While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.... In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever." (Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45)

Isaiah 28:16 was also interpreted messianically, as is clear from the rendering of the Septuagint. It is quoted in 1 Peter 2:6 and Romans 9:33; 10:11.

"See, I lay a stone in Zion,  
a tested stone,  
a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation;[8]  
the one who trusts will never be dismayed." (Isaiah 28:16)

There are also messianic references in the Rabbinical literature to the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel (Zechariah 4:10) and the stones in Isaiah 8:14, which is particularly germane:

"And he will be a sanctuary;  
but for both houses of Israel he will be  
a stone that causes men to stumble[9]  
and a rock that makes them fall.  
And for the people of Jerusalem he will be  
a trap and a snare." (Isaiah 8:14)

Two passages that were *not* interpreted messianically in Jesus' time were the rock of Horeb and Psalm 118:22, which Jesus quotes in the lesson we are studying today:[10]

"The stone the builders rejected  
has become the capstone.  
The Lord has done this,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes.

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This is the day the Lord has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it." (Psalm 118:22-24)

## The Rejected Stone Becomes the Cornerstone (20:17)

Given this background of understanding of the identification of the Messiah with the Stone, Jesus cites a passage they probably haven't looked at that way before.[11]

"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"?' " (20:17)

"Builders" is a participle of the Greek verb *oikodomeo*, "build," construct a building. It is also used in a transcendent sense for building up the Christian church (Matthew 16:18; Romans 15:20; 1 Peter 2:5).[12] Here, Jesus extends it to the builders of Judaism, the leaders who have become his arch enemies. The word "rejected" is *apodokimazo*, "reject (after scrutiny), declare useless." [13] The rulers didn't just make a quick judgment error on the spur of the moment. This word indicates that they had a chance to examine the "stone" carefully and then reject it after reflection.

The exact role of the stone in this passage has been disputed. KJV translates the Greek literally, "head of the corner," that is, the cornerstone of a building, one of the first building blocks placed in a building. Others consider it to be the capstone above the door or the porch.[14] Whichever the word refers to, the point is that while it was rejected by the builders, it ultimately was placed by God in the key position of the entire building.

## Crushed by the Stone (20:18)

Jesus continues:

"Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." ' (20:18)

Having established Psalm 118:22 as messianic, Jesus connects it with two other messianic verses about the stone. Isaiah 8:14-15 refers to stumbling on that Stone and Daniel 2:34-35, 44-45 refers to being crushed by it.

Jesus' choice of words concerning the destruction of the Messiah's enemies is a sober one. The word translated twice in this verse as "falls" is the common Greek verb *pipto*. The word translated "broken to pieces" is Greek *sunthlao*, "crush (together), dash to pieces," to crush in such a way that an object is put in pieces.[15] The word translated "crushed" or "grind to powder" is the Greek verb *likmao*. [16] These words portend a terrible fate for the Messiah's enemies.

### QUESTIONS

1. How does tenant farming work in Jesus' day? In our day? What did the owner of the vineyard expect of his tenants?

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2. What does the vineyard itself represent? The owner? The tenants? The servants who are sent to collect the owner's portion? Who is the son? Historically, how did God destroy the "tenants"? (20:9-16)
3. In 20:17 who is the stone? Who are the builders? In your opinion, why did they ultimately reject Jesus after studying him carefully?
4. In what ways did the Pharisees and Chief Priests stumble on the stone and were broken to pieces? In what ways are they crushed by the "falling stone"?
5. How can we detect when our hearts are rebellious against God? What should we do when we are angry at God? How can we prevent "a root of bitterness" against God to grow in our heart? Is this only hypothetical or is there any danger of the Stone crushing us to
6. Do Christians need to fear God's judgment? Back your answer with Scripture.
7. What are some "messengers" God uses to get our attention?
8. What is "fruit"? How can we become more fruitful Christians?
9. If God has sovereignly ordained all things, how can He hold us accountable for sin?

**Sources**

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