

In the name of Jesus, God's only Son and our Savior, dear friends,

Some people just don't get it. You give them warnings, and they don't pay attention. You tell people what's going to happen if they continue doing what they're doing, and they don't listen. You describe what they're acting like and they don't see it. Have you ever known someone like that? Have you ever felt frustrated, sad, even angry when dealing with someone like that? Have you even *been* that person once or twice?

This story told by Jesus was aimed at people just like that. He uses a parable to teach and proclaim an important message about himself and those around him. A parable, remember, is a story that uses earthly things to express a spiritual truth. Jesus wanted to teach spiritual people spiritual things. He often used parables so that God-fearing people would understand and learn, but those who opposed him would not. Sometimes Jesus explains what the parable means; sometimes it's obvious, and sometimes even the enemies of Jesus understood—like in this case. This parable forces all of us to consider Jesus and answer the question

WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH THE SON? Will you

1. **USE HIM FOR YOUR OWN PURPOSES?** (10-15a) or will you
2. **RESPECT, LOVE AND TRUST IN HIM?** (15a-19)

To really get the point of the parable, you have to know what's going on with Jesus and those who are listening to him tell the story. This took place on Tuesday of Holy Week, so it is only two days before Jesus celebrates the Passover and the Lord's Supper with his disciples and is betrayed by Judas. It is, then, only three days before he is crucified. He's got all of that in the forefront of his mind as he tells a parable which prophesies his rejection, death and resurrection.

There had just been an argument between Jesus and the religious leaders—the chief priest, the teachers of the law, and the elders. They interrupted Jesus as he was teaching in the temple, asking him by what authority he dared to teach there. Jesus refused to answer them unless they could answer his question about whether John the Baptist's baptism came from God or men. It is at that point that Jesus speaks this parable to the many people who were still there along with those religious leaders who had broken into the discussion.

The story is an interesting one—even more so if you know what Jesus was really saying! So here is the parable: ***A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. 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. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'*** 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.'*** So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ***What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.***

Hearts filled with compassion cry out for those representatives who approached the workers on behalf of the owner. And all the worse if you see just how horrible they were treated. Our translation perhaps downplays the severity of the beatings. What Jesus said they did to the first two servants was whip them, tear their skin off or beat them repeatedly. The third servant was wounded severely, injured to the point of leaving a scar (we get our word 'trauma' from that Greek word). The owner thought that perhaps things would be different if his son went. And, yes, it was different when the owner's son showed up. Those evil tenants saw this as a golden opportunity. They thought that if they killed the son, they could take his inheritance! They were using the son for their own purposes—to get rich!

I bet this story caused nervousness in the crowd of people as Jesus was calling out those religious leaders, making them the villains in the story as they opposed him, the Son of God! They must have been steaming mad! Imagine the tension in the air! The people understood what Jesus was saying and on one hand would side with Jesus, but on the other they may have feared these powerful leaders. Those religious men knew exactly what Jesus was implying and they did not like it one bit!

Oh how they wanted to get rid of Jesus! That's what they wanted to do with the Son of God—they wanted to kill him for their own purposes. If you're skeptical, let's go back some months before this and listen to the reaction of the religious leaders after Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead: ***But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. "What are we accomplishing? they asked. "Here is this man performing many miraculous signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our place (meaning the Temple, or perhaps Jerusalem) and our nation."*** And this was only months before they did put him to death! They wanted to use the Son of God for their own purposes. They wanted to kill him so that they could retain their positions of authority in the Temple and keep their country intact.

They must have burned inside hearing this story which was really about them! But what about you? Do you burn inside also, seeing yourself in the image of the evil tenants or in the real-life figures of the Jerusalem religious leaders?

It's not very pleasant to consider that we might be like them in ANY way, but we might be a bit like them. Have you ever thought that things in your life will go better if you simply add this religious element of worship and church involvement? Have you used the Son to get the girl or the guy? You know what I mean—you act like Jesus is important to you so that you can keep dating this person to whom he really IS important. Have you ever used the Son more to pad your resume than because you love him? Employers often like to see a spiritual component or a pastor as a reference. Have you ever gone to worship the Son at church simply to make peace in the family, even though it wasn't in your heart? Have you put up that Jesus-loving front for all to see, even though you had other purposes in mind at the time?

I don't know if any of those apply to you or not, but they're common enough. And I can tell you that your sinful nature works just like mine and it is very likely that each of us has used our faith, our church, the Son himself for our own benefit and not with perfectly loving hearts. We don't always worship him because we just can't help ourselves and can't stop telling people about him. No matter how much we hate it and don't want to admit it, the sinful nature so obvious in the wicked workers and the Jerusalem leaders condemns each of us as well. We deserve what those workers got and what the leaders did not want to hear was their future—death at the hands of the Father. Eternal death is what we ought to get.

What we ought to do with the Son is respect, love and trust in him!

What unbelievable patience the vineyard owner displayed! He continued to give those workers a chance to do the right thing. He even sent his dearly loved son to represent him! Did they respect the son? No! Did they love him even a fraction of what his father did? Not even a sliver! Did they trust him? Not at all! They only trusted that they would get his inheritance.

Did the priests and teachers and elders respect God's Son? Not even a little! They interrupted his teaching to try to kick him out of the temple. Did they love him? They HATED him! They wanted to kill him and they eventually would. Did they trust him or the words he shared with them? No! They would not see him as God's Son.

Jesus explains this parable to these men by using Scripture. He quotes a psalm well-known to them. ***The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone (Psalm 118:22).*** Then he adds: ***Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed (v. 18).*** Now they were REALLY ticked off! Listen to their reaction: ***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 (v. 19).***

Jesus had not met their test for the Messiah (which was a faulty test) and so they were discarding him. They had rejected God's capstone, his cornerstone. How ironic that the 'chief' or 'head' priests rejected the 'chief' or 'head' of the corner, as the original language calls that stone. This chief, or head stone was responsible for aligning the walls of a building and keeping everything square. The Son of God is that very thing for Church. What a blessing Jesus is for all who recognize him as the Son of God and Savior from sin! But woe to the person who trips and stumbles over that "stone," who will not believe in him. In the same way that the tenants of the vineyard would die because of their rejection of the owner's son—and the religious leaders would die in hell for their rejection of God's Son—so will all those today who reject Jesus as the Son of God and the world's only Savior.

What will you do with the Son? Will you respect, love and trust in him? Or will he be a stumbling block to you? Is your respect for him and his tremendous work of salvation evident in the way you talk and the life you walk? Even though he was true God, he was willing to live as a human being in order to be perfect because you and I are not! There's a problem if we can't respect that! He was then willing to be killed as a sacrifice for our sin! What tremendous love! If we can't love him back, something is wrong! Then he promises us that because he rose victorious over death, we too will rise from death to eternal life if we trust in him! What a shame if we can't trust that!

The truth is, even as God's people—as workers in His vineyard and as leaders in his church—we still harbor that awful sinful nature. We still act like the people we read about here. But we also know that because by faith we respect and love and trust in Jesus as our Savior, he takes all of those sins away. Even though we have done some terrible things to Jesus by the way we've talked and the things we've done, amazingly, Jesus totally puts those sins away and doesn't even remember that we did them!

And you know your response to that kind of love! You've felt it deeply and it's changed you! It's what gets you out of bed on a Sunday morning and into Bible Class and Sunday School. It's what prompts you to be ready to worship your Lord when you walk in those doors. It's what urges you to be ready in case someone asks you what you believe and what motivates you to share that sometimes even before someone asks.

What will we do with the Son? To God's people, those who have heard the gospel—the message of the Father's love in Christ—the answer is obvious. Our hearts are filled with respect and love and trust in him as our Savior. Keep on listening to him as he speaks to you, so that you can always answer “**What will you do with the Son?**” in a way that leads to eternal life with him. Amen.

Now the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.