

Produce Timely Fruits Of Faith (Matthew 21:33-44)

- 1) Jesus is faith's rejected cornerstone
- 2) God's patience for faith's fruits has a time limit

If there's one thing I've learned from being a student, employee, or a pastor, it's the power of a deadline. *Homework needs to be turned in at the start of class. Break is only 30 minutes long. The sermon and Bible study must be written by Sunday morning.* It's amazing how putting a deadline on something spurs us to finish it in a timely fashion. In our verses from the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us that God's patience for Christian living likewise has a deadline. God expects all believers to produce fruit in keeping with their faith in Christ. If we don't produce timely fruits of faith, God's Word can be taken away from us leaving us unable to produce fruits of any kind. But God is graciously patient for our fruitful lives as he tells us with the parable of the tenant farmers.

The parable of the tenant farmers is not one of those warm and cozy stories you might have heard in Sunday School growing up. In this earthly story pointed at the Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' time, our Savior tells us the heavenly meaning – we are to produce timely fruits of faith. Although we already read the parableⁱ, I'm going to retell it for you and give the historical explanation at the same time so you can see what Jesus was communicating to the chief priests and elders of the people. We start off with God, the landowner, who decided to plant a bountiful vineyard with a wall, winepress, and watchtower. The vineyard represents the kingdom of Godⁱⁱ which is where God rules through his Word in the hearts of believers. God then invited some tenant farmers to work his vineyard. The tenant farmers are the religious leaders called to lead the Israelites with God's Word. They would work in God's vineyard, produce fruits of faith, and willingly give a portion of them back to God for all he had given to them. But the chief priests and elders of the people would not produce timely fruits of faith for God. So God sent his servants, prophets like Elijah and Jeremiah and priests like Samuel and Aaron, to point the people back to God and produce the expected fruits of faith in a timely fashion. But the Jewish religious leaders did not listen to God's servants. They disrespected them by beating, killing, and stoning them. Yet God was graciously patient. He sent more prophets and priests to reform their ways. He sent his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, in a final attempt to bring them around. But the tenant farmers, when they saw Jesus, had the opposite reaction. Rather than exalt him, they decided to kill him by nailing him to a cross.ⁱⁱⁱ

Jesus finishes the parable by asking what the vineyard owner should do to the tenant farmers when he returns. The chief priests and elders of the people answer, **“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end...and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”**^{iv} In case the Jewish religious leaders didn’t know Jesus was referring to them, he asked, **“Have you never read in the Scriptures [Psalm 118:22,23]: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;’ the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.”**^{vi} In other words, God should take his Word away from them and give it to other tenant farmers who would not reject Christ as the cornerstone of their faith.

Why did the Jewish religious leaders reject Christ as the cornerstone of their faith? Why do people today reject Christ? Because to say we need a Savior means we need to be saved. A depressing reality check that says something is wrong with us and we can’t win salvation on our own. Like the Jews of Jesus’ time, people today don’t like to feel helpless. We look at God’s list of do’s and don’t’s and compare ourselves to other people. We so easily think, *“Have you seen that person over there? They can’t even make it to lunch without offending someone! I’m far better than them. If anyone needs a Savior, it’s them. Not me.”* When God says that we need to repent of our sins to receive forgiveness, there’s another stumbling block. Who here finds it difficult to genuinely apologize to someone when they know they are in the wrong? If you think it’s hard to apologize to another sinner, how much more difficult is it to apologize to the Almighty God who is perfect in every way?

Sin and Satan has so warped our way of thinking that when we hear the message that comes from God’s servants, we all too easily want to turn them away. Itching our selfish ears with the Bible stories that end with happily ever after than hear of God’s hatred for sin as seen in this parable of the tenant farmers. Because when we examine our hearts, do you know what we see? Something woefully similar to the Jewish chief priests and elders of the people. We know what God’s Word says, but all too often we turn our back to it and its messengers.

Do you want a faith that produces timely fruit for God? Then build it on the cornerstone of Christ and his promises. If your faith is built on anything else than Christ and what he’s done for you, then your faith is shaky at best. Do you know how important a cornerstone is? It is the stone that determines what the layout of

the entire building is. It's because of the precise placement of our sanctuary's cornerstone that our walls are parallel to the streets and our main entrance is both squared and visually pleasing. If our cornerstone were off, then all the church buildings would be off.^{vii}

As important it is for a building's cornerstone to be correct, it's all the more important that faith's cornerstone be in Christ alone. Jesus came down from heaven with his sights set on the cross. He knew what he would have to do if Jesus were to be the cornerstone of our faith – rejection by his hometown friends and family,^{viii} rejection by followers who only wanted full stomachs,^{ix} rejection by the chief priests and elders of the people,^x even rejection by God the Father when our sins were on him.^{xi} And so, bearing the weight of all our sins and rejected by all people, our Savior was nailed to the cross to receive God's punishment for sin that should have been ours to suffer. That is what Jesus' death on the cross means – that you are forgiven and sin has no mastery over you. You will not die for your sins for the price has already been paid. How true are the words of Psalm 118:23 **“The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”** A faith that is built on the cornerstone of Christ is indeed a marvelous thing because it will naturally produce fruit in a timely manner.

On the front cover of the worship folder, you'll notice an orange tree with a lot of fruit. You know the tree is healthy because of its fruit. The oranges are many, the right color, and what you expect to grow on an orange tree. If the tree started growing apples or pears instead, you would have trouble! Many times the Bible compares a Christian's faith with a fruit tree. If faith is rooted in Christ, then it will naturally produce fruit in accord with Christian living. What might some of these fruits be that you and I can produce? Let's look back at our parable to get some ideas.

Remembering that God is the vineyard owner and the servants are his messengers who preach and teach his Word, a fruitful faith will gladly listen to God's Word. When your alarm goes off on Sunday morning, don't be sad that you can't sleep in. Be glad that you get to come be with your brothers and sisters in the faith, praise the Lord in word and song, and grow in faith in a wondrous hour of worship. As you compare your schedule with the church schedule in the back of the worship folder, see if you can carve out some time for a Bible study here, in Vail, in Sahuarita, or our sister churches in the Tucson area. When God sends his servants your way with his precious Word, honor them. Not just your pastors,

whom you already honor, but all those who share God's Word with you. Family members who bring Christ up at home, Sunday School teachers who regularly trade in Adult Bible Class to train children up in the way they should go, elders who lovingly reconnect with inactive members. If the Lord has blessed you with an abundance of something, give a portion of it back in thanksgiving for Christ's sacrifice on the cross. These can be our offerings, white and blue collar skills, unique personality traits, or what have you. These are all different fruits you and I can produce out of thanks to God.

But don't delay in producing these timely fruits. Thinking back to the parable, when did the tenant farmers get themselves in trouble? When the vineyard owner came to receive the expected fruits. The vineyard owner showed great patience to receive the fruits, but eventually his patience ran out. As a result, this is what would happen. Jesus says, **"I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit."**^{xii} Historically this happened within the first few generations after Jesus' death. The apostles had initial success making disciples in the Jewish synagogues.^{xiii} But when you look at the Jewish people today, where is the good news of Jesus Christ? Nowhere to be found.

You and I haven't turned our backs on God and his Word. That's why you and I are here, to hear God's Word and grow in faith and knowledge in him! But as you look at your life, do you see the fruits that God expects? If we're going to call ourselves God's children then we need to live according to God's Word. But if you find your life lacking in timely fruits of faith, soothe your guilty conscience with God's patience. Yes his patience is not infinite, but it's far greater than we deserve. Make use of the time that God has given you to produce fruits of faith in a timely manner. Go to the cornerstone of your faith and believe what Christ's cross means for you. Life and salvation, forgiveness of sins, peace with God, and so much more. Keep going back to Christ so that you may build out according to the straight lines laid by Christ. Willingly give a portion of your blessings back to God so that we may be all things to all people. For this is how we show our thanks to God for what he has done for us. And when God comes back on the Last Day to judge the living and the dead, do you know what he'll say to all those who call Christ their cornerstone and produce fruit in a timely manner? *"Come. Come with me and receive your inheritance waiting in heaven."* Amen.

End Notes

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- ⁱ Matthew 21:33-39. Mark 12:1-8 and Luke 20:9-15 also record the same parable.
- ⁱⁱ Matthew 21:43.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus spoke this parable on the Tuesday of Holy Week. He would be crucified on the following Friday.
- ^{iv} Matthew 21:41. All biblical quotations come from the 1984 edition of the New International Version unless otherwise stated.
- ^v The 1984 edition of the New International Version reads “capstone” instead of “cornerstone” which is found in a footnote as another legitimate translation. Both architectural terms are valid understandings of the Greek phrase κεφαλὴν γωνίας. Interestingly enough, many of the popular published translations only list “cornerstone” without any reference to a “capstone.”
- ^{vi} Matthew 21:42,43.
- ^{vii} <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cornerstone> (Accessed October 19, 2017). While this author doesn’t normally cite Wikipedia articles since its information can easily be changed and/or falsified, the top portion is an apt summary of a cornerstone’s importance in architecture as found in other places.
- ^{viii} Matthew 13:53-58; Mark 6:1-6.
- ^{ix} John 6:60-66.
- ^x Matthew 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-20; Luke 23:1-25; John 19:1-16.
- ^{xi} Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34.
- ^{xii} Matthew 21:43.
- ^{xiii} Romans 1:16 shows the God-given principle that Paul followed in his missionary journeys recorded in the book of Acts. Paul would first witness to the Jewish people until he was no longer welcome. Then he would witness to the Gentiles.