

Last week we began a sermon series dealing with Christ teachings; Christ's foundation of teachings for the Christian faith. It focuses on what Jesus taught during Holy Week as recorded by Matthew. We see that in Holy Week on day one, Jesus enters Jerusalem, He goes to the temple and He looks around. He assesses the situation. On Monday, day two, He returns to Jerusalem and He deals with what He saw. He saw corruption, He saw His temple turned into a den of thieves and so He made a whip of cords and He drove out the money changers; those who sold goods, the thieves. On Tuesday the 3rd day of Holy Week, He returned and taught. He was first questioned about His authority, but He put it back on the leaders and they could not answer His questions, so He then launched into His first parable of Holy Week, the parable of the two sons. One son who said to his father I'll go and do whatever you tell me and then didn't do anything. The other son who said I won't do what you tell me, but then did it anyway. And it was a message about the religious leaders and how they had dealt with John the Baptist; because when John the Baptist came, he preached saying repent the Kingdom of heaven is near. It was the tax collectors, the prostitutes, those who were sinful, and saw themselves as sinful that responded to his message and through the power of the Holy Spirit they changed. You see, they were the ones who initially were, 'we don't want anything to do with you,' but then they did. At the same time, it was the religious leaders who were the ones who were saying 'we'll do it!' and then didn't do it. And so, after telling this parable Jesus says to those religious leaders; 'even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.' Saw what? The miracle, the transformation of the tax collectors and the prostitutes when they repented. Who is him? John the Baptist. What was their reaction to seeing this message that John gave, and this miraculous transformation of these individuals? Well they sought to have John the Baptist killed and ended up having Him killed.

And right on the heels of this parable; one that probably had those religious leaders looking at Jesus and thinking, we really don't like you. He comes back with the parable of the tenants. It's a parable concerning prophecy and yet reality. It's a parable concerning false teachers and the need to expose them. It's a parable concerning the church today. And it's a parable that begins there was a master of a house. This would be an estate and it represents God. It's a metaphor that both they at that

time, and we can understand. How does someone get to have an estate like this? Well they're wealthy and they're buying out the smaller farms. They're investing with their money. There is nothing wrong with that, in fact this person in the in the parable, he invests in it. He plants a vineyard, he puts up a fence, he digs a winepress, and he builds a watchtower.

Now for those religious leaders, when they hear this, it wouldn't only equate to what they saw happening because they were the wealthy ones that were buying people out; but also, because it is a retelling of a prophecy. It's a retelling of Isaiah chapter 5, which begins is Isaiah's love song. Let me sing for my beloved, my love song concerning his vineyard. Who is Isaiah's beloved? God. Who or what is the vineyard? The northern tribes of Israel and the two southern tribes of Judah. Well what does Isaiah's song sound like? I'm not going to sing it to you, but I'll read it to you, and I'll throw in a couple little explanations as we go.

The song goes like this. My beloved; (that would be God) had a vineyard, (that would be Israel and Judah) on a very fertile Hill, (that would be the Promised Land) he dug it and cleared it of stones, (that would be a reference to the conquest, that God delivered it into their hands and got rid of the Canaanites) and planted it with choice vines. Here in Lodi and wine country, we would say 12 varieties; The 12 tribes of Israel. He, God built a watchtower in the midst of it. This is a reference to the Law and to the priesthood who were to spiritually preserve knowledge and protect the people. And he hewed out a wine vat in it. This would be a reference to the Temple. And he looked for it to yield grapes, (this would be worship, thanksgiving) but it yielded wild grapes. This would be rebellion against God, His law; His prophets. Does this sound familiar? It certainly would to them.

But the song doesn't end there. In verse seven, we see 'for the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the House of Israel and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting. And he looked for justice but behold bloodshed; for righteousness but behold an outcry. And what is the result of that? The six woes; and the word woe is a very important word in the Hebrew language. It means certain destruction and annihilation. Why? Verses 8 through 10, woe to them because of their unbridled greed at the expense

of others. Verses 9 through 12, woe to them because of their unbridled pursuit of hedonism, self-gratification, and the expense they forgot the Lord. And then there's a little interlude; in verses 13 to 17 Isaiah sings on behalf of God; 'therefore my people go into exile for lack of knowledge. The watchtower had failed to preserve knowledge and pass it on. The vines had not listened, they did not learn, in fact they demanded something new, something that they would like to hear. Again, sounds a little familiar. But the reality is without God's word, we will not know what is happening, nor what we should do.

And as a result, the woes then continue. Verses 18 and 19, woe to them because they eagerly pull sin their way. They deny the heavy cost of sin; in fact, they dare God to punish them. Verse 20, woe to them because they call evil good, they called light darkness and the darkness they call light. Verse 21, woe to them because they are wise in their own eyes and because in their own sight, they see themselves as very shrewd. Verses 22 and 23, woe to them because they acquit the guilty for a bribe and deprive the innocent of his rights. You know, I couldn't help when I read that last one, thinking about what we are seeing in our country today. People rioting, burning down businesses and is there an arrest of them? Are they held accountable? No. Why not? Because if we do that, they might not vote for us. And so instead the owners of the businesses are deprived of their rights.

All of this should be sounding very familiar to us and when we get to verses 24, and to the rest of chapter 5 of Isaiah; another 7 verses, it is nothing but just judgment because of this kind of behavior. Which brings us back to Christ's parallel parable. It's time for the harvest. The master who has invested all over the place, sends his servants to collect his harvest and what happens? Well they beat one, kill another, stone the third. Notice there's three things that happen there. Three is the number of God. This is the result of what happened when God sent them Moses, the priest's, the judges, the people rebelled against them and treated them poorly. So, the master sends even more, this would be a reference to all the prophets and the same results. So we heard last week they were treated poorly, they were afflicted, they were sawn and two, killed with the sword. It was terrible. But what happens? The master says I'll send my son. They will respect my son.

And now here is the key point. I mean if you've been ignoring what I'm saying, if you've been dozing off, wake up, listen! Here is the response of those tenants, the religious leaders, those who claim to be religious. This is the heir! They know the son! They see he is the son of the master and what is their response knowing that he is the son of the master? They say, 'let's kill him and take his inheritance.' What is his inheritance? The people and the glory that is to be given to him.

And as Jesus finishes off this parable with that; He then asked those religious leaders a question. What will He do to those tenants? And you know what, they accurately respond with what is found in Isaiah chapter 5. 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death. He'll rent the vineyard to others who will return the harvest.' To which Jesus gives them a final prophecy; "Have you never read in the scriptures?" It's a reference to Isaiah 5, but it's also a reference to Psalm 118 and Jesus quotes it. "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes." This is real justice. Jesus lays it right out for them; "the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing fruit." It's a reference to the Gentiles, to you to me.

And He goes on speaking about this cornerstone Jesus; He says "whoever falls on the stone, the cornerstone, will be broken to pieces." This is like the tax collectors, the prostitutes. When we see that we are sinners and we fall at the throne of Christ; and when we fall at the foot of the cross, we're broken. We realize we're sinners, we fall short of the glory of God, but we're told we will be made whole. We're broken to pieces but made whole. We're made His children. Children with a purpose to declare His deeds, to be the watchtower. We're a new creation, the old is gone, the new has come. It's like Matthew, the tax collector became Levi, became a gospel writer. But for those who the stone falls on, judgment. They will be crushed, It's judgment.

You see; one of the most significant things in this whole prophecy is the watchtower. The watchtower is there to protect. It's not just a reference to the priest back then, the Law. It's a reference to God's word. it's a reference to pastors, to elders, to deacons, to everyone parents,

grandparents, who know the word of God and we are to preserve that knowledge and pass it on. God's word is precious. Why? Because it tells us of our Salvation. It tells us of our sin, it tells us what to look for; back then, and how to equate it to now. It's a call for us to look back at that prophecy of Isaiah 5, to look at the prophecy of Christ's parable to learn from it and to grow from it. What we are living in right now is real it is prophetic. So, like Jesus we need to look at it, we need to act, and part of that action is to come before Him and fall on our knees, be broken, acknowledge our sinful past, through what we have done and not done. But again, to be transformed, become like Isaiah where we say, we sing within our hearts, sing with our voice, (all be it with masks on right now.) My beloved God had a vineyard, Zion, on a very fertile hill. Lodi, He dug it and cleared it of stones, planted it with choice vines; that's you, that's me! And we are going to bear fruit. Fruit of Thanksgiving acknowledging what He has done. Fruit of praise, He alone is God. And fruit of preserving the knowledge of Him; sharing it with our family, our neighbors, with any who are lost in the darkness of this world.

In His Name, Amen!