

The title of this morning's sermon is "*The Stone that the Builders Rejected Has Become the Cornerstone.*"¹

We are working our way verse-by-verse through Luke's Gospel, and we find ourselves at **Luke 20:16**. This morning, we will finish [the parable of the vineyard owner](#).

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Not long after Katie and I moved to Washington, my parents followed us. They found what seemed like the perfect house. It was beautiful, and the price was low. I wondered, *How could this house have stayed on the market for so long?*

Come to find out, there was a crack in the foundation. The house was so unstable no bank would back a loan. On one hand, I thought *It is sad that such a beautiful house seemed to lose everything because of a poor foundation!* On the other hand, I thought, *How valuable is a house with a poor foundation?*

Buildings are not the only things that need strong foundations: marriages, families, and nations do, too. We will see in this morning's sermon that when the nation of Israel rejected Jesus as their foundation, or cornerstone, they also lost their value.

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Let's briefly review what we have covered so far:

Luke 20:9 And he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while.

We know the vineyard owner represents God, and the vineyard represents Israel.

Luke 20:10 When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. 12 And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out.

The servants the vineyard owner sent represent the Old Testament prophets, whom Israel repeatedly rejected and mistreated.

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As discussed last week, much of the parable would seem absurd to Jesus' listeners.

First, it was hard to believe the tenants would respond this way. The worst tenants would do is refuse to provide the expected fruit, not beat the servants, and send them back empty-handed.

Second, it was hard to believe the owner would respond this way. No owner would keep sending servants who were mistreated without getting upset at the tenants. It reveals God's longsuffering nature.

Luke 20:13 Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.'

With this verse, the owner reaches the height of absurdity. No reasonable father would send his son to check on tenants who severely beat the servants sent to them. Sending a son would be the LAST thing a father would do.

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How do the tenants respond to this incredible demonstration of love, patience, and compassion? Would they go so far as to beat the vineyard owner's son, too? They do even worse than that:

Luke 20:14 But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' 15 And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?

The tenants' wickedness reached an all-time high with this decision. They didn't even talk about murdering the servants, but they murdered the beloved son. They represent the religious leaders who want to murder Jesus.

Luke 20:16a He will come and destroy those tenants

I want to break up this verse into three parts. This first part we covered last week. God is longsuffering, but his longsuffering ends when his Son is rejected.

Now, look at the new material for this morning:

Luke 20:16b and give the vineyard to others."

Because the vineyard represents Israel, how do we interpret the vineyard being given to others?

Although God did give the nation of Israel over to other nations to punish them, such as when Assyria conquered the northern kingdom and Babylon conquered the southern kingdom, that's not what's in view in this verse.

Instead, it is better to understand God takes his attention off Israel and puts it on the Gentiles. And this brings us to lesson one:

Lesson One: God stopped focusing on Israel and focused on Gentiles.

Turn one chapter to the right and look at Luke 21:21-24. Your Bibles probably have a title for this section, such as "The Destruction of Jerusalem" or "Jesus Foretells the Destruction of Jerusalem."

We know this is referring to 70 AD when Rome conquered Jerusalem to punish the Jews for rejecting Christ. We have talked about this a few times in recent sermons. Look at verse 24:

Luke 21:24a They (the Jews) will fall by the edge of the sword and be led captive among all nations

This is the diaspora, or dispersion of the Jews throughout the world, which we see even up to today.

Luke 21:24b and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles

This refers to the Romans and all other nations that have occupied Jerusalem throughout the last two millenniums. Think of the Palestinians today.

Now look at the end of the verse:

Luke 21:24b until the TIMES OF THE GENTILES are fulfilled.

This is the time when God's focus is on the Gentiles instead of the Jews, and it is more commonly called the Church Age. The Church Age and the times of the Gentiles are synonymous because even though there are some Christian Jews, the church is primarily Gentiles.

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So, here's what we see...

God isn't going to destroy his vineyard just because of bad tenants. Instead, he gives the vineyard to tenants who will produce fruit.

And Gentiles do! Missionaries are mostly Gentiles. The gospel is spread mostly by Gentiles.

Listen to the parallel account in Matthew:

Matthew 21:41 “[The owner] will put [the tenants] to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants (referring to Gentiles) WHO WILL GIVE HIM THE FRUITS in their seasons.”...⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you (Jews) and GIVEN TO A PEOPLE PRODUCING ITS FRUITS (again, Gentiles).

Jesus makes this same point in the parable of the wedding feast. Turn two books to the left to Matthew 22 so I can show you what I mean.

Here’s the context. A king throws a celebration for his Son:

Matthew 22:1 And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ² “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³ and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.

You can already see the parallels between this parable and the parable of the vineyard owner:

- Both parables have servants who are sent.
- In both parables, the servants represent the Old Testament prophets.

Matthew 22:4 Again he sent other servants, saying, “Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.” ⁵ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business,

I have shared with you a few times that Jesus said outrageous or unbelievable things to make his points, such as:

- A father giving his rebellious son his inheritance that he knows he will squander.
- Or a vineyard owner sending his son to tenants who beat up the three servants.

And this parable contains something else absurd: the idea that anyone in Jesus’ day would reject a king’s invitation to attend his son’s wedding.

The people in Jesus’s day typically worked six long, 12-hour days, followed by one day off, and then it began again. Life was short, difficult, and, compared to our lives, largely uneventful.

Everyone wanted to attend weddings. They were large parties and one of the only times people could relax and be fed by someone else. For most, a wedding would be the highlight of the year. And if it was the king’s son’s wedding, it was a once-in-a-lifetime event. In other words, nobody would “*pay no attention and [go] off to [their] farm [or] business.*”

So, what was the point of Jesus saying something so absurd?

It is absurd that people would reject the king’s invitation to his son’s wedding, but it is even more absurd that people would reject the King of Kings’ invitation to join his kingdom.

If Jesus’ listeners said, “Nobody would reject an invitation to the king’s wedding,” Jesus could say, “It makes even less sense that anyone would reject eternal life.”

Matthew 22:6 while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.

Here’s another parallel with the parable of the vineyard owner: the servants, representing the Old Testament prophets, are mistreated.

Matthew 22:7 The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.

Another parallel: the people who mistreated the servants are destroyed.

Matthew 22:8 Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy.

This refers to the Jews. Keep in mind it says they “were not worthy.”

Matthew 22:9 Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ 10 And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.

This invitation is the gospel being given to Gentiles because the Jews rejected it.

And here is another parallel: the vineyard owner would not destroy the vineyard because of bad tenants. Similarly, the king would not cancel his son’s wedding because people rejected the invitation.

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We watch the focus move from Jews to Gentiles in Acts. Turn to Acts 13. We won’t turn back to Matthew.

Acts 13:45 But when THE JEWS saw the crowds (these are Gentiles listening to Paul and Barnabas preach), they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. 46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you (the Jews). Since you thrust it aside and JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY OF ETERNAL LIFE, behold, WE ARE TURNING TO THE GENTILES.

Remember, in the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus said, “Those invited were not worthy.” Now Paul says the Jews “Judge [themselves] unworthy.” When people reject the gospel, they show they are unworthy of eternal life.

Turn to Acts 18.

Acts 18:5 When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying TO THE JEWS that the Christ was Jesus. 6 And when they opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, “Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I WILL GO TO THE GENTILES.”

The Jews rejected the gospel, so Paul said he was going to Gentiles.

Turn to Acts 28:28. At the very end of the book, the third to last verse, Paul told the Jewish leaders:

Acts 28:28 Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

Acts is the history of the early church, and it ends with the gospel going to the Gentiles.

Now, turn back to Luke 20, and I will connect the dots to see why the parable of the vineyard owner is so important.

Jesus is letting the Jews know that the opposite of what they think will happen will happen. Briefly look back at Luke 20:14 to see what I mean:

Luke 20:14 But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’

They thought murdering Jesus would get them the inheritance. Jesus told them they were actually going to lose the inheritance that had been given to them as God’s chosen people. It is going to the Gentiles.

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Now look at Luke 20:16 to see how the Jews respond to this teaching:

Luke 20:16 He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “Surely not!”

The Jews learned God was going to stop paying attention to them to pay attention to the Gentiles, and they couldn’t believe it. They are not arguing with Jesus. Instead, they are horrified.

That’s why in some Bibles, “Surely not” is translated as:

- “God forbid!” in the NIV
- “May it never happen!” in the NASB
- “May it never be!” in the Amplified

Basically, it sounded so bad they “Surely” hoped it would not happen.

But Jesus tells them that this is exactly what’s going to happen:

Luke 20:17 But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written: “‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’?”

We look directly at people when we want them to know we are completely serious. It is almost like Jesus is saying, *“Yes, there are times I use hyperbole or exaggeration or say things that sound outrageous to make a point. But this isn’t one of them. I am being literal. This is going to happen.”*

Jesus emphasized the literal nature by quoting Psalm 118:22.

Psalm 118:22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

This Old Testament prophecy fits perfectly with this parable, and this brings us to lesson two:

Lesson Two: The stone represents the son, and the builders represent the tenants.

The rejected stone represents the rejected vineyard owner’s son, and the builders who rejected the stone represent the tenants who rejected the son.

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Just like the Jews would be familiar with the Old Testament teaching that they were the vineyard, they would also be familiar with Psalm 118:22, identifying the Messiah as a cornerstone.

We know this because this is the same Psalm the Jews quoted at Jesus’ triumphal entry:

Psalm 118:26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

And now Jesus quotes verse 22 from the same psalm.

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We are familiar with Psalm 118:22 because the New Testament quotes it many times.

Peter and John quoted it to the religious leaders:

Acts 4:11 Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.

Peter quoted it in his epistle:

1 Peter 2:7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”

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It is a theme in Scripture for Jesus to be compared to a stone or a rock:

Zechariah 10:4 From [Judah] shall come the cornerstone (referring to Jesus).

Isaiah 28:16 Thus says the Lord, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation (referring to Jesus).”

At least once in the Old Testament, the pre-incarnate Christ wasn't just referred to as a stone or rock, but he seemed to be one! That was when he followed Israel in the wilderness and gave them water:

1 Corinthians 10:4 [Israel] drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

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Think about Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the statue representing the world's different kingdoms. Jesus is the stone cut without hands that strikes the statue, destroys the kingdoms, and fills the earth:

Daniel 2:34 A stone was cut out by no human hand (referring to Jesus), and it struck the image [and it was] broken in pieces...35 [And] the stone...became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

Think of the way Jesus concluded the sermon on the mount with the parable of the two builders:

Matthew 7:24 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on THE ROCK. 25 And the rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, BECAUSE IT HAD BEEN FOUNDED ON THE ROCK.

Jesus is that rock, and if we build our lives on him, we survive the storms of life.

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We can go further and say Jesus is compared to a special rock or stone: the cornerstone.

In ancient times, it was the first stone laid, and it was the most important. It was in the corner formed by the junction of two primary walls.

The cornerstone did two things. First, it supported the entire building because it was the most important rock in the foundation. It would bear the weight of the two walls coming off from it, making it essential for the whole structure.

Second, because two walls were built off the cornerstone, it determined the shape of the building. All the other stones had to adjust themselves to this rock.

You can see how all this looks to Christ. He was the first stone laid for the structure that we know as the church, and he's the most important. As part of the foundation, he supports the entire structure:

Ephesians 2:20 [the church is] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.

Second, just as the cornerstone determined the shape of the building, so does Jesus determine the shape of the church. He is the head, and as we obey him, he determines what the church looks like.

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Now think about this for a moment...

Ephesians 2:20, the verse I just read, says the apostles and prophets were part of the church's foundation.

We know this is the case, but it is not what we would expect if we lived in Jesus' day.

The religious leaders were important individuals in Israel's history, and we would expect them, not the apostles and prophets, to be part of the foundation. But when they rejected Jesus, they rejected the church because by rejecting Jesus, they rejected the entire structure that was built off him. The apostles and prophets became part of that foundation instead.

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So, let me be clear about the many important things Jesus was doing with this parable:

- He claimed to be the owner's son, and because the Jews knew that the owner represented God, they knew Jesus was claiming to be the Son of God.
- He claimed to be the stone the builders rejected by quoting Psalm 118:22, and because this was a messianic Psalm, Jesus claimed to be the Messiah.
- He claimed the Jews would murder him by saying that the tenants would murder the owner's son. We are so used to this that we think little about it. But how do you think it sounded to the Jews that they were going to murder the Son of God, who was also their Messiah? It would have sounded horrible and unbelievable to them.

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And here's probably the most important reason Jesus preached this parable...

In a few days, the religious leaders will arrest and murder Jesus. Now let me ask you this...

When they do:

- How do they look?
- And how does Jesus look?

They look victorious. Jesus looks defeated.

And the parable itself makes Jesus look defeated. Luke 20:15 says they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. That looks defeated.

But then, Jesus quotes Psalm 118:22, letting everyone know he will be victorious, and they will be defeated.

That's the point of:

Psalm 118:22 The stone that the builders rejected HAS BECOME THE CORNERSTONE.

This is about Jesus' victory. Another way to say it is that even though they rejected Jesus, God the Father chose to exalt him.

Listen to these verses describe the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone...

Philippians 2:8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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Quoting Psalm 118:22 also showed that the religious leaders who looked victorious would end up defeated. Look at the last verse of the parable to see that point:

Luke 20:18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

And this brings us to our last lesson:

Lesson Three: Fall on Christ’s mercy or he falls on you in judgment.

It is easier to understand this verse if we split it in half and see the first half applying to believers and the second half applying to unbelievers.

The first half:

Luke 20:18a Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces,

Upon first reading, falling on Christ and being broken to pieces sounds like a bad thing you don’t want to have happen to you. But it’s the good kind of brokenness like David experienced over his sin:

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are A BROKEN SPIRIT; A BROKEN AND CONTRITE HEART, O God, you will not despise.

The people who fall on the cornerstone, or fall on Jesus, are broken of their pride and self-will,

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Now look at the second half of the verse:

Luke 20:18b and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

Those who will not be broken over their sin will be broken by Christ’s judgment.

Anyone who insists on opposing Christ, like the tenants in the parable, end up pulverized by him.

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Listen to these two verses tying it together:

Isaiah 8:14 He will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. 15 And many shall stumble on it. They shall fall and be broken; they shall be snared and taken.”

Because the Jews rejected Jesus, they stumbled over him and were judged. Those who trust in Jesus find him to be the chief cornerstone of their lives.

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Let me conclude with this.

In these verses, Jesus might sound severe or harsh, but that is not the case. Warnings are always loving. They let us know when there is danger ahead. Jesus was warning people in his day that if they rejected him, they would be judged.

This is a fitting way to conclude because the same is true today. We have two choices:

- In brokenness and humility, we can confess our sin and fall on the grace and mercy of Christ to be saved.
- Or, in pride and rebellion, we can reject Christ, and choose to have him fall on us in judgment.

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If you have any questions, or I can pray for you in any way, I'll be up front after service, and I'd consider it a privilege to speak with you.

Let's pray.

ⁱ Done:

- EW
- Pulpit Commentary
- Hendriksen
- Wiersbe