

Stand Firm on the Cornerstone
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“We do not like their sound, and guitar music is on its way out,” said Decca studios as they refused to sign the Beatles. It is hard to believe that a record company would turn down a band that would soon become and remain one of the best-selling music groups in history, selling over a billion singles and over one hundred million albums. I can imagine that Decca Studios regretted their decision for a very long time! The rejection of such a great band seems foolish and shocking! The parable Jesus tells us in the gospel reading is far more shocking. His parable is about the rejection of the Savior, the stone on whom God’s church would stand! It seems ludicrous that anyone would reject the Savior, and yet that is what happened and continues to happen today. Jesus wants us to know how to handle this rejection and how to live in a world that hates him. Jesus teaches us that in the face of a world that rejects our Savior, we can stand firm on our eternal cornerstone!

The religious leaders of the day confronted Jesus, trying to discredit and arrest him. They failed miserably. Jesus now tried to get these religious leaders to understand what God wanted, faith in Jesus. Jesus used a parable, or a story, to teach these men how important trusting in him as their Savior was. The first one went over their heads, so Jesus tried again, “Hear another parable.” This parable meets every standard for a great story. First, it starts with a familiar situation as it describes a master who plants a vineyard and carefully builds up all it will need to thrive. There is a fence to keep out animals and bandits. There is a winepress to make wine. There is even a tower to watch out for enemies! He thought of everything. Already this story would have grabbed the attention of his listeners. The story began a lot like Isaiah 5 which we read earlier. This was a section of scripture they knew well and was all about God saving his people. Immediately they would have known the master of this story was God.

The Master graciously lends his vineyard to tenants at the price of giving him a certain percentage of the fruit. This was a gracious gift to these tenants. In a shocking turn of events, when the master sent some servants to get his share, the tenants killed them! You would expect immediate action by the master, but he instead sends more servants. They are killed too but the master is not done trying. He sends his son next. Does that sound like a good plan? Would you send your son to a bunch of cut-throats who already killed your servants? NO! Yet, this master did. The story does not end like a Disney princess movie. The son is also abused, beaten, and killed. Jesus never finishes the story. He does not have to. It was clear enough that he had the listeners finish it for him. There was only one fitting end the Pharisees could conclude with, “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.”

Jesus is the son of the parable and the religious leaders are the tenants. Jesus was going to be rejected and would be killed by those very leaders talking to him. Yet, he went and tried to get them to turn from their unbelief and trust in him! He was loving and patient to the very end.

The tenants of this world still reject Jesus all around us. They hate him, misuse his name, and they do not have faith. How do we handle such rejection? Do we hear the wicked end the

master brings and think, “Good! Go destroy those wicked tenants.” Maybe that is even our hope today. God get rid of these unbelievers already! We can be tempted to focus so much on the judgment we hope those who reject Jesus will get, we fail to reflect the attitude Jesus had. Instead of patience and care, we would rather those who reject Jesus be brought to their wretched end here and now! We can get caught up in the rejection and lose the point. Jesus went to save unbelievers just like those tenants. He came to be rejected so he could save sinners like you and me. We deserve that wretched end too. We need Jesus to come and teach us who handle rejection. He does this by showing us the rejected son who came to save sinners.

Jesus looked at those who would kill him and patiently tried, again and again, to save them. Jesus walked into this life knowing those men listening to him would be the ones to reject him, beat him, and eventually cast him from Jerusalem and kill him on that cross. Jesus willingly walked to that vineyard full of evil tenants already knowing how the story would end. He knew death was coming but he still went., patiently trying to save lost souls. Then he gave us his life so that God would not look at you as the wretched sinner you were. Jesus never once lashed out, retaliated, or became hateful to those who abused him. He was perfect and willingly died perfect, so that there will never be a wretched end waiting for you. Jesus was abused and murdered to win for you the acceptance of God, that you would never be rejected by him. He made you pure and holy. Yes, this world is full of evil tenants that reject and hate the Son. We know how to deal with them now. We deal with them in patience, love, and an attitude of deep care because that is how our God dealt with us. If Jesus asks for you to finish your life’s story, how would it end? Well you know, it would end with you being welcomed into God’s eternal vineyard. It will end with you being eternally blessed because Jesus died to be the cornerstone that you, his church, are built on forever!

That is a story we can hear over and over. Jesus did not end with the parable though. He was not done with these tenants that would reject him. Jesus sharply demands, “Have you never read in the Scriptures.” Jesus is not asking. They had read the scriptures and were known for being the experts in the scriptures. Jesus was making it clear that they got it wrong. He quoted Psalm 118, which was a familiar Psalm talking about the promised Messiah, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” The Tower of Pisa is a building in Italy that leans. It leans because it was built on soft earth. The same will happen to a building that is built on a faulty cornerstone. The building would lean or fall. See, it was the first stone put down and it would guide the placement of the rest of the building. A strong, well, laid cornerstone gave builders and those in the building confidence in the structure. Would you go to a building that was built on a weak or crooked cornerstone? No, it might fall. That is exactly what these Pharisees did though. They had put their confidence in themselves and their religious lives to earn God’s favor. They rejected the True cornerstone to stand on a false, lopsided cornerstone. Jesus’ judgment is clear, “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!” God was going to kick the stone they stood on from under them and destroy them. God’s favor, which they worked so hard to get, would be lost forever all because they refused to believe in Jesus!

Jesus is giving us a warning here. Where is our confidence in this life for the next? Imagine a man trying to walk across the Grand Canyon on a single rope. Then the wind blows, and the rope moves. How far would you get? Not far! We would fall on such flimsy footing. It is

no less dangerous to walk through this life standing on any stone but Jesus. When I think for that split moment that my church attendance wins me spiritually bonus points, I walk off my cornerstone. When I get comfort in the good works I have done, then I step onto that deadly spiritual tight rope. When I have any confidence in myself to earn God's love, then I walk that rope I cannot hope to cross. That is because relying on ourselves or anything we can do is to reject Jesus as our cornerstone. That is exactly what our sinful nature wants and what we will struggle every day against. Jesus quoted this Psalm as a stark rebuke to the religious leaders of Israel and a warning to us.

Jesus also quotes this Psalm to fill us with absolute comfort and confidence. He quotes this Psalm because he is the Cornerstone the builders rejected! Jesus is the stone on which we rest and the rock that gives us confidence and certainty. Jesus takes your trust from you and places your trust on him, the cornerstone of salvation. It is on Jesus we rest our hope and know that we have a sure path to heaven. Jesus is our cornerstone! He will never pull away from you or leave you. Jesus is there through every struggle and trial that would crack and break you. The love Jesus has for you will endure forever! You can walk in this world confident that the Lord is your strength and your defense! Through his rejection, he has become your salvation! You are daily filled with shouts of joy and victory because your Jesus has done mighty things! You will not die, but you will live! Not because of anything you have done but because Jesus did it all for you! The gates of righteousness are open to you. Did you hear the words Jesus quoted? The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Can you imagine how Decca studios felt as they watched the Beatles rise to the number one record sellers? They rejected a band that would have made them rich! Can you imagine the terror those wicked tenants felt as they met their wicked end? Can you begin to imagine the horrible realization all those who rejected Jesus will have as he stands before them as their eternal judge? You never have to fear a wicked end. For you stand eternally firm on your Cornerstone! You stand with your faith in Jesus, the rejected son, who has won for your life now and forevermore! You can stand eternally echoing the Psalmist as you see what Jesus has done, "It is marvelous in our eyes!" Amen.