

Christ is the Cornerstone

Proper 22

Pastor Josh Frazee

Matt. 21:33-46

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Once again this week, violence has broken out in our country. The events that have taken place in Nevada are all over the news. President Trump and officials are preparing to discuss weaponry usage in the U.S. There has been a history of violence in this country; just as there is in other countries.

The motivations for these atrocities are not always known. Was it jealousy? Was it anger? Was it despair? Was it a need for attention? Sometimes there's a clue that might point to one or another of these, or even a couple of them—but unless the person says why they did it, we don't ever really know.

In fictional stories and even in the Bible, sometimes we are told the motivations of the characters. We are able to trust these motivations are accurate because they are told to us by reliable sources—the creator of the characters or God who is the Creator of us all.

What are your motivations? If someone were to ask you, would you be able to tell why you do the things you do? Sometimes you might be able to. God tells us in 1 Peter chapter three that we are to “always (be) prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” Yet other times you might not be able to. There may be times that you feel like Paul when finding a reason for why you did the things you did. Paul describes his feeling in Romans chapter seven: “I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”

In our text today, Jesus gives another parable—one with violence, motivations, and a question at the end.

Verse 1

Jesus told another parable to the chief priests and Pharisees. ““There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower around it and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, “They will respect my son.” But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, “This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.”””

Here because Jesus is narrating the parable, we get a glimpse into the motivations of the characters. The owner of the vineyard sends his son believing that while his tenants may not have honored his servants, they would surely honor his son. We also hear the motivations of the bad tenants that their desire is to get the inheritance by killing the owner's son. This was not as far-fetched as it sounds. In New Testament times, if there were no son, then there was a good chance that the tenants of the land would inherit it.

This parable is about the chief priests and Pharisees to whom Jesus is speaking. As the Creator, Jesus knows the motivations of these men. He knows already that they do not have faith, and where that will ultimately lead. Even before Jesus came, God had tried for years to reach His people through the prophets. While some listened, others put many of His prophets to death.

Even today God's messengers deliver His Gospel of salvation to some who will hear, and others who will persecute them. This makes sense logically. If they are not willing to listen to the Son, why would they be

willing to listen to the mere messengers? Listen again to what happened to even the son of the master of the vineyard.

Verse 2

“And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”

Those wicked tenants took the son out of the vineyard and put him to death. Shortly, the chief priests and Pharisees would do the same to Jesus. They would take Him out of Jerusalem and hang Him on a cross to die.

The world is so filled with violence that even the Son of God suffered it.

Yet Jesus concludes His parable with a question: “When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, ‘He will put those miserable wretches to death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruit in their seasons.’”

The chief priests and Pharisees like David with his sin involving Bathsheba speak what should be done to them. And, indeed, if they did not repent of putting the Son of God to death, they would have, and did, die unforgiven.

It’s so easy to say here that they deserve it or that the ones who do the violence in this day and age deserve it, but do *you* uphold the Fifth Commandment as you should? Jesus goes so far as to say even calling your brother a “fool” in your heart is tantamount to murder. And Luther puts in his explanation of the Fifth Commandment that “We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm or neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need.”

If your motivations have been to hurt or harm your neighbor or to even call him a “fool” in your heart, you deserve to be put to death and for the kingdom of heaven to be given to others. By our sinful natures, none of us deserve heaven, or even to live. We all deserve to die because we do not honor God, or His Son, or His messengers as we should.

Yet by the very same death the chief priests and Pharisees would deliver Jesus to God delivered us from death and eternal condemnation. By Jesus’ death on the cross, God paid for all of your sins, including where you have broken the Fifth Commandment. Sadly, many still do not believe.

Verse 3

“Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.’”

Though the chief priests and Pharisees did not regard Jesus as the Christ, the stone of God’s kingdom, He has become the cornerstone. Through His suffering and death on the cross of Calvary, He has established the means of salvation.

Those who refuse Jesus as the Christ will find themselves shattered when they hear the news that they are eternally condemned. But those who have faith in Him will be saved. This Gospel is the cornerstone of our faith, and without it, all is lost.

We who believe on Jesus as the Christ will, because of our faith, bear fruit in accordance with it. That is the aim of every group of this church, from the elders to the voters to the trustees to the LWML.

Yet these works do not merit our forgiveness. We've already received forgiveness by our faith in Jesus as the Christ. No, these works are done, these fruits are born, *because* we believe. You are the new people to whom the kingdom has been given. And it is by nature of your being new people—having been made new by Jesus' death and resurrection applied to you in faith—that you now bear fruits. And you will be welcomed into the kingdom of heaven—not because you have born fruits, but because Jesus paid the price for your sins. In Jesus' Name. Amen.