



There was once a wealthy man who wanted to get in on some of the action in Silicon Valley. His name was Bill. Bill had an idea and he decided to form a business around it. Bill handpicked a team of young guys to run it. He loved these guys. He'd identified them as up and coming leaders when they were in school and he'd mentored them and taught them his business insights for years. All of them were broke, but Bill didn't need them to bring money to the table. He needed them to bring their minds and passion.

Bill set them up with everything they needed. He purchased a beautiful 12-story building in which they could run the business. They had a hot new product, a strong support staff, the finest technical equipment, and a generous contract that would allow them to share in the profits. With hard work, they'd bring a product to the market that would benefit the whole world and they'd get rich. It was a great situation.

Because Bill was diversified in many projects, he gave all day-to-day operations to his staff and said once a quarter his people would check in to see how it was going. After four months he sent his accountant in to look at the books. Strangely, the accountant was met with a rather cold reception. In fact, the team insulted him and refused to show him the books. Bill was confused and upset, but figured they were just being a little territorial. So he waited a few weeks and sent one of his attorneys in to touch base, but again the guys refused to cooperate. They even started talking as if it was their building, their technology, their business and not Bill's. After all, they were doing all the work. When the lawyer showed them the contract they had signed they got so upset they called security and had him escorted out!

As you can imagine, Bill was getting very concerned that he'd lost control of his own business. During the next few months he filed a lawsuit and sent several attorneys in to meet with the guys. Each time they were met at the door by an increasingly hostile security team. These guys were downright abusive! One attorney went home with a black eye; another had a heart attack and died right on the premises. This was getting out of hand!

After so many failed attempts and increasing hostility, Bill decided a change in tactic might work. Instead of making this about the law and contracts, what if he approached the guys relationally? Bill had a son, his only child, who stood to inherit everything he owned. His son was with him when he set up the team and the guys all knew him. Bill thought that maybe the problem was

a generational one; maybe his son, being their age, could connect with these guys in a way that he couldn't.

So he sent his son into that building, and when the guys recognized who it was they got very excited. They figured old Bill had finally bit the dust, and now if they could just get rid of his son the whole business would be theirs free and clear. Before Bill's son even got to the conference room, the guys had given the order for the security force to put a bullet through his temple. As Bill's son lay in a pool of blood, the four original members of the team gathered around him, each grabbed a limb, and threw his lifeless body onto the street.

Within hours Bill received news of what they'd done to his son. The question was, What will Bill do now? He was overcome with grief. He was angry at the arrogance of these men he trusted. He was saddened that something that started with such promise could turn so badly. He had lost control of his company and he'd lost his son. What would he do now?

As you might have guessed, Bill is a fictional person. But I told this story because it captures the essence of another story which Jesus told; a story that gets at the very heart of how God has operated in history. It's a story in which Jesus asked this same question, What would God do if that were to happen to him? How does God deal with people he cares deeply about, yet reject his rightful authority in their lives?

This issue comes up at the end of Mark 11. Jesus is in the last week of his earthly life. He entered Jerusalem on Sunday, toured the Temple, and retreated to the little town of Bethany. The next day, he returned to the Temple and saw that this place of prayer for everyone had become a place of profit for a few proud priests and politicians. He flipped over tables and drove out the vendors and shut down the whole business.

You don't do something like that without ruffling a few feathers. The question that would naturally flow from that is, "Who gave you the right to do that?" This is what the religious leaders asked him the next day in v. 28, "***Who gave you the authority to do these things?***" Instead of answering their question, Jesus countered with a question of his own about John the Baptist and where he got his authority.

This put them in a quandary. If they said John's authority came from God, they would have to believe what John said about Jesus being God's Son. But if they said his authority came only

from man, they'd lose favor with the people, because the people believed John was a prophet.

They copped out and responded, "We don't know." So Jesus said, "Then I won't answer your question either." Jesus exposed the fact that they just cared about their own agenda.

Then Jesus tells this story in Mark 12: a story revealing how these religious leaders had rejected God's authority and what God would do about it. But it's not just about them; it's a story that could be about us.

## **God Establishes His People with Care That They Might Bear Fruit**

The parable begins in 12:1.

**Jesus then began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a pit for the winepress and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place."**

Jesus begins by describing how God set everything up for the nation of Israel to succeed. Everyone who heard these words would have recognized echoes from Isaiah the prophet (Is. 5:1-7).

The vineyard was a national symbol for Israel. In fact, the very Temple in which Jesus stood proudly displayed a carved grapevine, 70 cubits high, sculpted around the door which led from the porch to the Holy Place. The people all understood how God, like the landowner in the story, had taken great pains to make the vineyard healthy and productive.

Think of the rich history of the nation Israel: How God had called Abraham from Ur and promised to make him into a great nation. How God had raised up Moses to deliver his descendants from slavery in Egypt and plant them in a land flowing with milk and honey. How God had protected them as they conquered the land under the leadership of Joshua. How God had raised up a King from the sheepfolds named David to shepherd his people. God established his people as a vineyard.

And notice he hands over his precious vineyard to some vine growers, leaders like the ones Jesus was speaking to at that very moment—priests, scribes, and elders (Mark 11:27).

God has been no less gracious in establishing us. We have a far richer vineyard than even the Jews had. We have God's written word, the Bible. We have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We have the cross and the promise of forgiveness. We have the resurrection and the hope of eternal life. We have the community of God's people, both past and present, to cheer us on. We who live in America have the freedom to worship and share our faith and vote for leaders who share our values and concerns.

I think about this often. We have so much—spiritually, intellectually and materially. I think of Jesus' words in Luke 12:48, "*From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded.*"

What excuse do we have for **not** bearing fruit? God has graciously provided for us, and I can think of none.

## **God Patiently Pursues His People Despite Their Rebellion**

God looks for fruit. In this story the owner of the vineyard sends servants to the vine growers to receive some of the fruit of his investment. In verses 2–5 it says:

**At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. But they seized him, beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Then he sent another servant to them; they struck this man on the head and treated him shamefully. He sent still another, and that one they killed. He sent many others; some of them they beat, others they killed.**

The sending of these servants pictures God's patient pursuit of his people despite their rebellion. The violence done to those servants portrays how Israel's leaders had treated God's prophets. Elijah was harassed and hounded by Israel's king, Ahab, and his wicked wife, Jezebel. Jeremiah was put in stocks and laughed at as people strolled to the Temple. Zechariah was stoned to death near the altar of God. John the Baptist, the last of the prophets, was beheaded. Notice in the story how the violence gets worse.

All of this was done for one reason: they wanted to possess the vineyard for themselves. They didn't want to answer to a higher authority. They didn't want God butting in on their life and telling them how to live.

People will go to incredible lengths to protect their right to run their own lives. In this country, we violently defend our right to run our own lives. We say things like, "You have the right to be happy," which often means nothing more than, "You have the right to be selfish." It's no surprise when God sends someone into our lives who calls us to surrender to a higher authority, we find ways to shut them out. We shut them out of our families because God's ways seem so antiquated. We shut them out of our sexual lives because we all have "needs." We shut them out of our business ethics because you've got to get ahead in the world.

## **God Shows Irrational Love for His People by Sending His Only Son**

Oh, the patience of God to keep sending prophets into that kind of hornet's nest. But the day came when God sent more than just prophets. Look at verse 6:

**"He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, 'They will respect my son.'"**

For the first time in the story we get to hear the owner who thinks: "They will respect my son." In essence he's saying, "Maybe they'll listen to my beloved son. Maybe they'll relate to him

because he'll be with them. Certainly they'll treat my son like they'd treat me, if I were there in person."

In this hostile, volatile situation, wise advice says, don't send your son. Martin Luther said, "If I were God and the world treated me as it treated him, I'd kick the wretched thing to pieces." But God was compelled by unthinkable love. *"God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shouldn't perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

Rebellion, hard hearts and stubbornness do not stop God from showing his unconditional love. He wants everyone to know that he loves them and relationship with him is always possible.

We want to say, "Don't do it, they killed the prophets and they will kill him." But it's like God is saying, "I know you're going to kill my Son and I'm sending him anyway because I love you that much and his death will become the means for anyone to experience eternal life. Eternal life for anyone who believes is better than the Son staying in safety and living."

In an interview with actor Johnny Depp, he was asked four questions: "There are four questions of value in life ... What is sacred? Of what is the spirit made? What is worth living for? What is worth dying for?" His answer: "The answer to each is the same. Only love."

As you ponder his action and his motive, it's natural for us to wonder: What would compel me to send my only son into a war you knew he would die in? Belief in something that was greater than an individual life. We see this in history when people have died for freedom and we call them heroes. We see this in the life of Jesus Christ dying for love and we call him the Savior of the world.

In the face of such rebellion and arrogance, God wanted to offer salvation and love to anyone who would believe in him. Look at verses 7–8:

**"But the tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they took him and killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard."**

Are there limits to his patience? What happens to those who keep on pushing his authority out of their lives? How long will God let this go on? In v. 9 Jesus asks that fateful question.

**"What then will the owner of the vineyard do?"**

It's the same question we asked of our friend Bill, "What will the owner of the business do after they kill his son?" We might be tempted to think that this was a tired and anemic old man with no fight left in him. We look at our world today and we see people refusing to submit to God, insisting on running their own lives, spurning his Son, in some cases even killing his messengers, and nothing happens.

It goes on and on and we wonder, Where's the owner of the vineyard? Where's God? Why does he allow it to go on and on?

## **God Forms a New People Built Upon the Vindication of His Son**

Jesus answers that question in v. 9.

**"He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."**

There comes a time when the owner of that vineyard has had enough. There came a time in the history of Israel when God removed his vineyard from those appointed leaders. This is one of the tragedies I've seen emerge as we've read through The Story—the Messiah came to the Israelites and they rejected him. It was only about 40 years after Jesus' telling of this parable that a great national judgment came upon Israel as the Roman General, Titus, destroyed the city of Jerusalem, leveling the Temple.

He gave that vineyard to someone else. Who was it? The answer is alluded to in verses 10–12.

**"Haven't you read this passage of Scripture:**

**'The stone the builders rejected**

**has become the cornerstone;**

**the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?'"**

**Then the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders looked for a way to arrest him because they knew he had spoken the parable against them. But they were afraid of the crowd; so they left him and went away.**

Jesus changes images here from a vineyard to a building with stones. These two verses are a direct quote from Psalm 118:22–23. The Stone the builders rejected... Jesus Christ is the Stone. Jesus Christ was rejected by the spiritual leaders in Israel. 1 Peter 2 calls Jesus a living stone, precious and marvelous.

Jesus describes himself as a rock in the well-known parable about two houses. One house was built on a rock; one house was built on shifting sand. Jesus was calling himself that rock. Any person who placed their faith in him, as Savior, would build their life on his solid, perfect foundation. However, anyone who built their life on anything other than him was like a person building their life on shifting sands. Eventually, those lives are destroyed by their unsure foundation.

Do you remember how the soundness of those two houses was tested? Storms and waves.

When everything is going well—you're making a lot of money; you're getting promoted; your kids are behaving well; you're not facing any challenges; life is generally going upward—it's actually difficult to discern the difference between a house built on a rock or a house built on sand.

## Jesus Became the Cornerstone

In modern construction, we don't need cornerstones because we have foundations in our structures.

However, in ancient architecture these huge, perfectly shaped cornerstones would establish the soundness of a building. A good one had straight sides, no cracks or imperfections. It couldn't be a soft rock, like sandstone, mudstone or shale. It had to be hard. The Old Testament gives instructions about building the temple saying "high grade" stones must be used. And the cornerstones were huge. In Jerusalem's temple, the cornerstones were 17' long and 7 1/2' thick. When Jesus rose from the dead and defeated death, he became the cornerstone of salvation for anyone who would call on him.

The Apostle Peter quotes these verses when he was explaining to the Jerusalem spiritual leaders about the death and resurrection of Jesus. Imagine him standing before a large crowd of them and saying what's recorded in Acts 4:11: "**Jesus is 'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.'**"

Later Peter described how this building isn't just our individual lives, it's Jesus's church being built. "**As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to**

*him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: 'See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.' Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,' and, 'A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall'" (1 Peter 2:4–8).*

Each person has the choice to build their life on Jesus or to reject him and build their life on something else. Each person has the choice of whether they want to place their faith in Jesus and have their life built on the Rock or live their life according to their own schemes and plans.

I encourage you to turn to Jesus today.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*