

Mark: To Know And Follow Jesus

In preaching, it can be really easy to “bury the lead.” Often, we can get caught up in Greek words and theological underpinnings, and it can get a bit large, and we can’t see the forest for the trees. I don’t want to bury the lead. I want to give that to you right out of the gate. I want you to have this little phrase in your mind as we go through the text because it will help you to process what’s happening within this confrontation that, yet again, Jesus is having with the religious leaders.

So here’s the main point I want you to hold in your mind: You are a steward, not an owner. As I unpack this, it will be a very uncomfortable thing for a modern Western American individual who says, “I am the author of my own destiny. I am the author of my story. I can be true to myself.”

Mark, since the beginning of chapter 11, has been unpacking this theme of Jesus’ authority. It began with Jesus entering Jerusalem. What the whole gospel’s been pointing towards is Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem. He arrives on the back of a donkey. We talked about how that’s commonly known as the Triumphal Entry, but actually, the way that Jesus and Mark depict this, it should be much more the anti-triumphal entry. He counters all of the triumphal fullness that we would assume.

When he marches into Jerusalem, he goes into the temple, and there he curses the fig tree. He walks into the temple, throws the tables up, and overturns all action. He essentially shuts down the work of the temple for the day. In that confrontation, he looks at the religious leaders and says that they are hiding behind religious hypocrisy. We talked about how that should hit home for us.

It’s easy for us in sections like this where we talk about the authority that we point the finger over there or outside these walls and say, “It’d be great if culture out there understood the authority of Jesus.” But I want to remind us that Mark is writing for the insider. He’s writing for you and me. He’s writing for those who are within the Jesus movement. He is saying that before you point the finger there, make sure you look inward and understand how you encounter this authority of Jesus.

Then after flipping the tables, Jesus leaves. He comes back again, and the religious leaders have a few questions for Jesus. I’d have a few questions for that person as well! It’s important to remember this question from Mark 11:28 because this is all one big scene that we’re witnessing. *“By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you authority to do this?”* Now Jesus is coy and brilliant, so he doesn’t quite answer the question directly. He actually answers it with another question about John’s baptism—was that from man, or was that from God? They can’t really answer. They know the answer, but they really don’t want to give the answer, so they just say that they don’t know, which is a lie. They did know, but they feared the crowds. *“So they answered*

Jesus, “We don’t know.” Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things” (v. 33). What’s ironic is that it’s a brilliant move because it disarms the situation.

We pick up in chapter 12:1, which immediately follows. This is not a change of scene; the curtain is still up, it has not dropped, and it’s nothing different. The crowd is the Sanhedrin, the religious leaders, which is this collection of 71 officials. So this is not a small scene. This is a pretty high point in the gospel. It is a showdown between the religious authorities and the Kingdom of God, and an upstart rabbi, Jesus, who’s just directly confronted them, forcing their hand.

A few weeks ago, I said at this point in the story Jesus is no longer trying to hide his identity. He is looking at those who understand him saying, “You either have to crown me as king or crucify me.” He’s not leaving them an option anymore. For us that know the story and are familiar with it, ironically, they’ll do both, but it will be a crown of thorns that will lead toward the crucifixion. But there’s a whole lot that Mark is unpacking between now and then.

They ask this valid, pertinent question, “By what authority are you doing these things?” Jesus has been moving and pushing the religious leaders in such a way that it’s beginning to cause them to be uncomfortable. It’s demanding things. This is a pertinent question. In some form or another, you and I actually ask this same question very often when we come to the teachings of Jesus that counter our presuppositions of what it means to be human. We may not word it in this particular way, but the resistance you feel when Jesus offers a hard teaching is, in some ways, our response. “Jesus, by whose authority do you think you’re doing these things? Who do you think you are, Jesus?” We think that he doesn’t have the right to ask us to do some things. We think that we can allow him into our lives in some areas but keep him at arm’s length in others. We think that he doesn’t have the right. “By what authority are you doing in teaching these things?”

This is a pertinent question because it’s a question that grinds against us as modern Western Americans. We control our destiny; we control our story. In some ways, the only story of salvation that our culture at large believes is that we need salvation from the idea of salvation. We don’t need a savior. We don’t need something to save us because there’s nothing wrong. We think that we are the author of our life.

We all would like to sit in this room and think that we have surpassed that, but this is the air we breathe, the water we swim in. We have been formed deeply by this idea that we are the author of our story, so when we come to this question, come with an open mind that maybe Jesus has something for you and me this morning as well.

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. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. Mark 12:1-2

Jesus is speaking in parables. A word about parables. They're not nice stories with a moral. We can tend to reduce them to that, but they're actually far different. It's a brilliant teaching mechanism. It's the reason you understand or will remember a show you watch more so than the sermon I'm preaching now. It's because stories get to us in a different way. In a world before Netflix, Jesus would use something like a parable.

A parable invites you in. Through narrative, it will provoke things in you in such a way that lodges in your memory in a different form than just straight teaching. They operate under their own logic. It's almost like sci-fi in the sense that parables exist, in some ways, in a different universe, but they draw parallels to this world. And you'll see some of that in this story where there are some parts of this parallel. It's not logical; it doesn't make sense what Jesus is speaking about.

So the parable begins with this story about a man who plants a vineyard and puts a wall around it. He digs a wine press. He builds a watch tower. It's a fully operational vineyard. Lindsay and I spent six years in the Napa Valley before we moved to the Bay Area. If you've been to Napa, you know what this looks like. Jesus is saying there's a man who has a fully operational vineyard. It's ready, and it's producing fruit; it's producing wine. But the owner of the vineyard says that he rented it out to some farmers, and he moved somewhere away. He brought in farmers to tend the vineyard. Their responsibility, the contract into which they entered, was that they would work that vineyard to produce fruit for the owner of the vineyard, not themselves. They're tenants; they're not owners.

So he hired some farmers and brought them in. All of this is a fully operational vineyard. Their responsibility was to be a steward of the vineyard. They were given authority, given power over that vineyard from the owner of the vineyard. “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” (vs. 2-3).

They were to bring the fruit to bear, harvest that, and give it to the owner of the vineyard. Everything was going well, so the owner sent his servant. But when the servant arrives, the tenants make a move here where they're no longer trying to be stewards of the vineyard; they're acting as if they're the owners. So it says they seized him, beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. This is like a Mafia movie where they are sending a message, “Don't mess with us. This is our vineyard now.”

“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” (vs. 4-5). A couple of thoughts. One, I don't want to be in line at this point to be the next servant! Things are not going well. He just keeps sending these

servants one after another, and each one, they treat them severely. It says that they struck one on the head; they treated him shamefully. They sent another one. That one they actually killed.

The insidiousness of the tenants is to over and over again assert what they believed was their rightful position as owners of the vineyard. I don't know how much “many” means when it says he sent many others, but it's more than three; we know that for sure. And on top of that, the owner is sending more and more. This is where the story gets a bit illogical. At some point, you don't send a servant; you send the army in or something. You send more than just the servant. But the owner is, in some ways demonstrating an immense amount of patience.

For whatever reason, he sends one servant after another, trying to remedy the situation, trying to invite them into their rightful position—not as owners of the vineyard but as stewards. The plan was that it would produce good fruit, but the only thing that the owner has reaped from this vineyard is violence, shame, pain, death, and hurt. That's all he's gotten. He hasn't gotten a grape yet. He hasn't gotten a nice pinot. No wine, no fruit. He's just reaped this pain.

“He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’” (v. 6). This is the moment in the story when I would imagine the Sanhedrin are probably angry at Jesus. It's a moment of anger, but internally. They're leaning in a little bit. What's the owner going to do? Mark wants us to feel that tension. He's going to take this treatment over and over and over again. What message is he going to send? This is the moment where Liam Neeson gets fired up and gets his vengeance. We know this plot; we know this story. Read verse 6 again. “He had one left to send, a son, whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’” Now this is where it gets to the level of absurdity. I don't have a son. I have two daughters, but I can imagine what it would be like to send a child into that scenario. I can assure you I would not be sending my child after the long line of servants who've been beaten, put to shame, and killed.

This is an absurd moment in this story. This is where the parable lives in its own universe. You and I do not send our children into this scenario, so what is the owner doing? What's happening is with the servants, the owner is appealing to the tenant's integrity. He's saying, “We entered into this agreement. You are the tenants, not the owner.” But when he sends the son, the son has a different standing in comparison to the tenants. The son is the rightful heir of the vineyard. The son is the only one who could step foot on that property and say, “This is my vineyard.” He's the only one. He's appealing to the law. He's saying, “My son is the rightful owner. You will certainly respect my son.” But look at the way the story unfolds. *“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” (vv. 7-8).*

They see this not as this moment in which the owner is asserting his authority but rather as a moment that is maybe of the highest threat. Because when the son shows up again, he's the rightful heir, and they actually identify him. They recognize the son, know who he is, and know the implications of him showing up in the vineyard. And so they say,

"If we kill him, he's the heir; maybe that means we will then get the inheritance."

I don't follow the logic there. I don't quite understand where if you kill the son, the owner's going to hand the vineyard over. It doesn't quite make sense. There's a sense in which they're blinded by their own posture of hubris and arrogance so that they think if they kill the son, then they will receive the inheritance. Notice not only did they kill him, but they throw him out of the vineyard. This was an honor/shame society. To not have a proper burial would've been a horrendously shameful act, and they don't even give the owner that dignity. They kill him and throw him out of the vineyard with no regard for the owner.

Now, parables are brilliant because parables work at a few different layers. They work both at the surface level of what's happening in this particular moment in the life of Jesus. He's confronting the Sanhedrin; he's going into the temple, the place which God instituted to allow the world to experience the presence of God. There's that layer in which this parable is working, and the Sanhedrin, I imagine at this point, are fuming because they're putting the dots together. "God's the owner of the vineyard; the tenants are us (Sanhedrin), the servants are the prophets of Isaiah and Jeremiah and all those of old." They're mapping this and recognizing Jesus is importing himself as the Son. He's made those claims and them as the wicked tenants. So I imagine they're starting to squirm because the parable is working at that level.

But parables are much more than that. They're working at a different level as well. This parable is working at a level for you and me as well. It's both the story that's happening there, but it's the story that you and I are invited to lean into and understand. It's not just onlookers of this scene. Mark is saying, "Where are you?" Jesus is teaching you and me. This is the story that's very much for us as well. And you see the Sanhedrin; when Jesus started talking about this vineyard and this story, particularly this parable, their minds would've immediately gone to Isaiah 5 because Jesus, in some ways, is preaching Isaiah 5. That's one way to look at this. It's not quite mapped on exactly the way that I'm preaching this text, but Jesus is, in some ways extrapolating this text from Isaiah.

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones, and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. Isaiah 5:1-2

Does that sound familiar? Jesus says, A man planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it. He dug a wine press. Jesus is teaching this text, and the importance of that is the Sanhedrin, as they would've immediately gone to Isaiah 5, recognized the theme that is a predominant theme throughout the scriptures that Israel is likened to a vineyard. So they're making this connection, and Jesus is saying that the judgment that came through the prophet Isaiah is about you, but even more so for us, it's about them, and it's about me, and it's about you. Jesus is inviting us to see that we are the wicked tenants in this story.

We are the ones who, like the story depicted, have tried to seize ownership but remember, you are a steward, not an owner. The Sanhedrin was this place of power in which they had been given a modicum of authority from God to say; you are to mediate between the world and me. This is the story that goes all the way back to Genesis 12 when Abraham was blessed to be a blessing. God tells Abraham that from him, all the nations of the world will extend, and you are to be a blessing to all the nations. You are image bearers (Genesis 1 and 2).

Next week you're going to see this encounter with Jesus and taxes and the Roman authorities. Jesus is going to ask for a coin. He will ask, "Whose image is on the coin?" And on that coin would be the image of Caesar, which is his way of asserting authority. His image was carried out throughout the empire. In the same way in Genesis 1 and 2; you and I are stamped with the image of God.

Our task, then, as the people of God, is to image God into the world, to represent him. But we are not the creators of the world. It's not our world. It's not my image I'm supposed to spread. It's the image of God I'm supposed to spread. Our particular personality, skill set, social location, career, and vocation, will often appear, but it isn't about me. I'm a steward; I'm not an owner.

These tenants are stewards, not owners. They were never meant to be owners. They were never meant to seize control. And in some ways, this parable is a 12-verse summary of the entire scriptures. From the beginning, what Adam and Eve in the garden said was they wanted to be like God. They wanted to be the dictators of what is right and what is wrong. They wanted to become like God.

Remember, the beginning of the invitation was here's the garden filled with shalom and beauty and wholeness, and God places Adam and Eve and says, "I've built this for you to enjoy. I've built it for you to work with me and to cultivate this place, to spread the flourishing and shalom of the garden throughout the entire world." But the story of the scriptures, the story of human history, is how we have taken that invitation, and like these tenants have said, "God, I'd rather extinguish you because I want to do my own thing. I don't want it to glorify the kingdom of God in the world. I want it to extend my own kingdom."

The confrontation with the Sanhedrin is a confrontation of kingdoms. Whose kingdom will reign? Will it be the kingdom of this religious power authority, or will it be the kingdom of God? Will it be the kingdom of Kevin and my desires, my impulses, all the things that are bent inwards toward me? Will it be the kingdom of Kevin that extends, or will it be the kingdom of God that extends?

I am a steward, not an owner. We bend that inward and make it about ourselves because, in many ways, the bottom line is this: you do not belong to yourself. What Jesus is getting at in this story is that all of creation, your life, kids, story, job, intellect, skills, and resources, everything you've accomplished, none of that belongs to you. The tenants assumed it all belonged to them. Do you see that? But Jesus says, "No, it wasn't about you. It was about the fruit you were to produce. You do not belong to you."

Now that should make you uncomfortable! Some of us know the right answer here, and so we can ease into that. I would actually suggest you might be in a worse place to let it not unsettle you because this story is not about us being the owners. It doesn't diminish particularity, God has wired you in a particular way to image God in your unique expression, but it's not about you. You do not belong to you.

As Americans, we have been ingrained from birth to say, "I am the one who holds the destiny of my life." We are the ones who have all authority. And in some ways, when we bump into this idea, we ask Jesus what authority does he have to speak over our life in that way? I've accomplished this. I've achieved this. I've reached this level. I've earned this. It's my right to be true to myself. That's maybe the most unquestioned philosophy of our day—be true to yourself.

Robert Bellah, a sociologist out of UC Berkeley, published this landmark book in 1985 in the field of sociology called *Habits of the Heart*. The subtitle was "Individualism and Commitment in American Life." In this book, he describes a particular cultural trend that he argues, and I agree with him, has given shape to the modern Western world. It's a shift from a communal understanding of the world to one in which self-expression is the highest good. It's what he calls "expressive individualism." What he means by that is that the predominant ethic from which we live, the predominant way we view the world, is that the highest good is not just individualism but that you must express your individualism into the world. It must be evoked into the world.

To not express your individualism is actually, in some ways, to go against the grain and against the way of the world. So that's why it feels so odd when you say something like, "Hey, we are living under authority. You do not belong to you." That would make you squirm a little bit because what's happened, what Bellah draws out, is that the self has become the reference point for all of reality in the modern world. And if the self is the reference point for all of reality, then that means you filter the world, the events of the world, and everything through the self.

I would argue maybe the thing that instills this into our being the most is the smartphone; the world is at your fingertips. Everything is right here available to us, but even more so, it goes way beyond 2005 or when the iPhone was invented. It really, in some ways, goes to the very founding of our country. This is at the heart of what it means to be American is this individual free will. And again, that has done a lot of good in the world. This is a nuanced, tricky conversation, but we have to recognize this goes well beyond this particular moment.

And the reason I want to say it goes further than that is because we can so easily think we know the answers. We know we belong to Jesus. But I want you to just ask the question, have you maybe been more formed by this expressive individualism?

Listen to this quote from a 1992 joint opinion piece written by Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy. He says, "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." Think about that statement. At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence,

of the very universe. That's a lot of pressure. That's a lot of weight. To define the concept of your own existence, of the very universe, is a lot. I'd suggest it's far more than I can handle.

When I seize that position, and I believe that about the world because that's what's been ingrained in me, that's what the whole world points towards. So when we, as followers of Jesus, come into this with this mindset, we wrestle with this and wonder, but what authority do you have? I'm the reference point of the universe. What authority do you have to say it's better to give than to receive? What authority do you have to say I'm to love my enemies? No, they're my enemies. What authority do you have to say I should love my neighbors? I am at the center. I have the right to define the world the way I desire. But Jesus is confronting this and reminding us that we are not the owner; we are the steward. You do not belong to yourself. You belong to God.

In another book, sociologist Charles Taylor wrote one of the more important books in the last hundred years called *A Secular Age*. He wrote a follow-up book called *The Ethics of Authenticity*, and in this book, he essentially maps the same thing that Robert Bellah does, but with a little bit of a different language. He talks about the idea that we live in the age of authenticity. Meaning the world we live in, the way we find our being in the world is through expressing our authentic selves. What you feel must be true. You are the center of the universe. So if you feel it, it must be true. If it's something that you understand or comes to mind, then yes, of course, why would that be wrong? Again, be true to yourself. No one questions that. You talk to your neighbor and say, "Hey, just go be true to yourself."

The statement, "You do you," makes no logical sense. Particularly as followers of Jesus because "you do you" doesn't make sense within the world of Jesus. We're called to follow Jesus. We are his apprentices. We're his disciples. We follow a rabbi who we believe is Lord of the universe. There's a level at which this has to happen at sheer obedience, but there's also a level of wisdom that says maybe if he is the Lord of creation, he understands how the world operates.

So maybe his kingdom isn't backward. Maybe our kingdom is backward. Maybe his kingdom isn't upside down. Maybe our kingdom is the one that's upside down. Maybe his is the reality, and ours is the parody. And so we follow Jesus, and we don't necessarily be true to ourselves because we recognize that we may not know fully how we are supposed to be. So we lean into our rabbi. We learn, we disciple; we understand his teachings about how the world operates. And we say that we want that to become the very center point of who we are. We are not the owners of this story. We are stewards of this story, given authority by Jesus, not through our own ability.

But in Taylor's book, he writes this quote, which he's writing from a neutral position. He says, "The dark side of individualism is a centering on the self, which both flattens and narrows our lives, makes them poorer in meaning, and less concerned with others or society." Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*

Taylor's book is this historical account of watching this giant shift in which it went from the belief in God being the assumed reality; it was just natural. You woke up; you believed in God. Five hundred years ago, everyone did that. They may or may not follow God, but the belief was that God was there. Five hundred years later, that's all shifted. It's an important shift. That's a monumental shift in a very short amount of time on the scope of history that now you wake up, and you don't believe God exists. You have to be convinced of that. And so what fills that vacuum, because we're still the created humans that we were over 500 years ago, is there's now a vacuum of meaning in understanding how the world operates. Taylor's point is when the self becomes the center; it actually flattens meaning. It gives you less understanding and purpose in life because, for all of human history, you were created for something far beyond yourself. When we buy into this expressive individualism, I would suggest you're actually flattening meaning, which feels sideways in our world because we're to be true to ourselves. If I'm not true to myself, I don't live authentically into who I am and what I feel, then I'm outside the bounds of what our culture says.

The tenants said this is my vineyard. This is, in some ways, a unique problem to our time, but it's really an age-old problem in which we resist and try to extinguish God from our lives because that means we don't have control over our life. And so much of this comes down to control. But the gospel, the good news, is that you are not in control. If I'm the center of my universe. If I'm the center of all the existence of the universe, if I'm the one who has the right to define what life and the universe mean, I'd just say we're a bit crushed by anxiety. I don't have to make that argument if you look at our world. The mental health epidemic and anxiety levels are rising generation after generation—maybe it's partly because we put the weight of the universe on them. Maybe you are carrying the weight of the universe. It's a lot to carry. It's more of a weight of glory than you were ever intended to carry. You were never meant for that.

But this world has shaped us in such a way that we believe we are owners. But we are not. We are a steward. And that's good news. That's gospel news. That's a lighter burden to carry. Because if you are a steward, that means it narrows your focus. It gives life to your existence because God has created and endowed us with particular interests and callings and personality types and positionings, and all these things where we can then learn to express those not for ourselves but within the larger work of the kingdom of God. Your life, career, emotions, calling, friends, money, and resources, all of those things are God's that you get to steward for a time for the flourishing of creation.

This then means I don't have to do everything. I have to do this thing, and this thing is what God has called me to. I don't have to operate the whole vineyard; I just have to tend this particular branch. The vineyard's God's. He owns it, not me. I'm a steward, given authority over a particular thing. It means you have a role in this story, but you are not the full story. You are a blip in this story. And again, for many of us, we carry this weight as if we are the ones who hold everything; but we don't. So how do we get there? Jesus actually answers that question. *"What then*

will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others" (v. 9).

He said earlier, what then will the owner of the vineyard do? Now again, this is working within parable language. This is judgment coming. There's a moment in which judgment is coming, and Jesus says, this is what the owner of the vineyard will do.

"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?'" (v. 10-11). He says, haven't you read this passage of scripture? The Sanhedrin probably had it memorized. They would have read this passage. It's a quote from Psalm 118:22-23.

He quotes this discussion about the cornerstone. What's he getting at? Even today, the cornerstone is the most essential part of any building. It is the stone in which every other stone from the placement of that cornerstone finds its reference and its proper ordering in comparison to the cornerstone. You get the cornerstone wrong, and everything else downstream is going to be wrong. You have to lay that foundational stone first appropriately.

Jesus looks at the Sanhedrin, and they're squirming. They're uncomfortable with this. They're the wicked tenants. Jesus just said that he is bringing judgment on them. And he says, "Haven't you read the stone that the builders rejected..." Who are the builders? They're the builders, the Sanhedrin. They're the stewards. They were the ones that were equipped to run the vineyard. They're the ones who were there. He is saying, don't you remember that the builders, they rejected the cornerstone? They rejected it, but that rejected stone is, in fact, the cornerstone. Jesus, the one they rejected, was, in fact, the cornerstone. And so when they reject it, when they place something different as the cornerstone, everything else that flows from there is off because it's not in reference to the proper cornerstone.

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. v. 12

Church, what is your cornerstone? What is the thing in which all of your life finds reference? What is the thing in which every aspect of who you are and what you do, and what God has equipped you to do, what is it that it is finding reference to? Is it finding reference to Christ? Or it's only part of it. You're thinking that you'll start this side of the building, and that's my family. I like what Jesus says about family, so I'll place these stones, and this will work well. Or maybe you think that you actually like the love your neighbor thing. You'll place another stone in reference to that. But then Jesus talks about money, and you don't like that as much, so I'm not going to reference it to the corner. I'll just put it over here. Or I don't know about my sexuality. I don't want to touch that. I'm going to place that here. Maybe you don't like your neighbor, and you're thinking that you're not going to actually live in reference to that. You're thinking that Jesus doesn't know the guy that lives next to me, so I'm not going to allow that to be there.

What is it in which you find reference? Because if you're playing that game in which you're looking at Jesus and you're taking certain things from him, saying, this teaching, this teaching, not that one, not this one, if you're doing that, the reference point is you. You are the cornerstone. Just like the Sanhedrin, they are the cornerstone. Three times since chapter 11, Jesus has confronted the teachers of the law, the elders, and the chief priests, and in almost everyone, it says something to the effect that they were fearful of the crowds.

The reference point for the Sanhedrin, for the religious leaders, was the approval of others. Because it was through the approval of others that they gained power and authority, and position, their cornerstone was not Christ. It was not the way of Jesus. It was not even the story of Israel. They thought it was. They were the den of robbers. They were hiding behind religious hypocrisy. The cornerstone for the religious leaders was themselves. They were what was of utmost importance. It's why the tenants wanted to be owners, not stewards. They wanted to be the reference point of the universe, but Church, they were not. You are not. I am not. No politician is. Your bank account isn't. Wall Street isn't. Your boss isn't. Your neighbor isn't. Your past isn't. The cornerstone that your heart desires to have is that of Christ.

When we build our life off of something different, it feels out of whack at times. It feels like wearing clothes that don't fit. I would suggest that when you run into fear, you run into anxiety; and you lash out in that; you bleed out over others. It multiplies hurt and brokenness. And in the same way that the owner of this vineyard had only reaped hate and death and shame and brokenness, so too; if that cornerstone is wrong, you live with that. We carry that with us. And Jesus is saying, "Listen, you rejected me as the cornerstone, but what if you put me back in that cornerstone? What if I was the reference point for your entire life?"

There are two stories on offer this morning. One, like the Sanhedrin, you seize control. And the first story is that you continue to live as the reference point for the entire universe. You can do that, and Jesus will hauntingly allow you to do that. He's not going to demand or force himself into your life. If you want to be the one that is the center point of your universe, Jesus will let you. My guess is that fear, anxiety, stress, pain, and hurt, all those crops up somewhere. And if they don't, they tend to be suppressed.

Here's my concern honestly as a pastor especially in our area. This area has the means and the financial ability to numb that ache for a very long time. There is always another purchase. There's always another trip, another promotion, another thing. We can numb and suppress it long enough that it actually does a violence to our soul without us realizing it. That's my fear. We can come in here; we can go through the motions. We can act like we're praising the Lord and all those things, but ultimately, we're withholding parts of our life.

Here's the second story. Jesus is the cornerstone, and he says things like, "Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I'll give you rest. My yoke is easy." His yoke is his teaching. He is saying that his understanding of the world is easy and light. "Come to me if you're weary." That's the second story on offer. You are a steward, not an owner. It's how you were created. It's how you were made. It's how you will flourish. It's how you will thrive. It is the way in which your heart is longing to be set free to not be an owner but the steward. That will grate against everything we understand about what it means to be a human in this day and age. But Jesus says, "Come to me all who are weary, and I will give you rest."

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

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