

## “The Heart Stone” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Lent 5 April 6, 2025

- I. **Luke 20:9-20** – previously read
- II. **Today’s parable puts the religious leaders on notice.**
  - a. Today’s reading is after Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem which we will celebrate next Sunday... but Jesus has already entered Jerusalem to face His death at the hands of the religious leaders.
    - i. Other times that He interacted with the Pharisees or other leaders, He would slip away and stop short of being arrested or pushing it too far... because His time had not yet come.
    - ii. Yet, in today’s reading, Jesus’ time had come, and He was going to incite these leaders in order that they would follow through with their plans for His arrest and execution.
  - b. The parable is about a landowner who puts in all the capital needed to start a vineyard and then gives it to tenants who manage it.
    - i. Dr. Jim Voelz a professor from Concordia Seminary explains that starting a vineyard took around four years to get a good harvest.
      - 1. The first three years would be a lot of work by the tenants, and usually a landowner would seek 10% per year of the first three years’ harvest... and then on the fourth year, the owner received 50% per year from then on.
      - 2. It seems that he sent servants to recover the 10%, possibly over three different years, and the tenants actually beat them up and stole their money!
      - 3. Finally, on the fourth year, the owner would need to send an heir to finalize the contract for the future.
      - 4. However, they killed the son... and the owner would punish those tenants for their wickedness.<sup>1</sup>
    - ii. The religious leaders knew this parable meant that God was the owner of the vineyard, which represented the people of Israel, and that the servants sent to collect the owner’s portion represented prophets of old that the leaders rejected... and finally, there in front of them stood Jesus, the Son or the heir to be killed.
    - iii. God had given a special responsibility to the religious leaders, and they were unwilling to listen to His Word or His prophets... and they were about to carry out the Parable of the Wicked Tenants as they killed the Son.
      - 1. God was the ultimate in patient and caring as He sent prophet after prophet through the years... and now He finally sent His own Son.

- iv. Jesus then points them to Psalm 118, and a quote that the stone the builders rejected has become a cornerstone or keystone... but it will crush or cause some people to stumble.
  - 1. The first point of this stone passage is that the Pharisees and Sadducees would reject the Messiah, who is the main stone of God's building, or the cornerstone.
  - 2. The second point is that the stone (who is Jesus) will be a stumbling block and a crushing judgment for all who do not believe.
  - 3. The third point is that Jesus is giving us a little hint of His resurrection and the fact that we will build the Church on Him as the cornerstone, or the heart of the Church...the heart stone.

III. **I wonder, is Jesus at the very heart of our church today?**

- a. Is Jesus the stone on which we build this church, and the foundation of all our works and life?
  - i. 1 Peter 2 says, “<sup>4</sup> As you come to Him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, <sup>5</sup> you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> For it stands in Scripture: ‘Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in Him will not be put to shame.’” (1 Peter 2:4-6)
  - ii. The stone that was rejected by the religious leaders is now the cornerstone on which the people of God build the Holy Christian Church... and Ascension is part of that!
- b. How do you think people see Ascension when they attend here?
  - i. Are we a social club that has the “in” crowd and outsiders feel strange and out of place?
  - ii. Are we a church of politics that divides itself by party affiliation?
  - iii. Do we hold up the pastor as the most important person, as if I am the only way this church could continue into the future?
  - iv. Have we turned inward on ourselves, attempting to maintain what we have, while spending little or no time growing the kingdom of God, loving others outside the walls of the church building?
  - v. Do we seek new members to help with the budget... or do we witness Jesus Christ to all people for the sake of the Gospel?
  - vi. Do we look at God's Word as optional when it calls us to live in His will?
- c. At any point in time, these issues might arise within our congregation... along with lots of other things that do not demonstrate that Christ is our cornerstone.

- d. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were called out because they felt as if they deserved the vineyard because they were put in charge of it... but they never gave honor or credit to the owner... or his son.
  - i. When we set Jesus aside and make our church into a business, a social club, all about a pastor, all about a building, or all about our own wellbeing... we aren't building on the heart of the Gospel, nor the heart stone, Jesus Christ.

IV. **Jesus went to Jerusalem to become the center of our hearts and lives.**

- a. The great story of God's redemption comes to its high point in Jerusalem as the religious leaders fulfilled the prophecy underlying this Parable of the Wicked Tenants.
  - i. They would conspire against Jesus in back rooms and away from the crowds... figuring out how to kill the Son without starting a riot.
  - ii. They would have Him dragged out of the city where He would be killed on a cross.
  - iii. The stone had been rejected, tortured, and executed by the people God had entrusted the Savior of the world to come from.
- b. This death was a pure and holy sacrifice for all of the times we don't stand on Christ... we don't make Him the center of our lives... we don't follow His commands to love others.
  - i. Jesus laid down His life so that we could become a holy priesthood.
  - ii. Jesus laid down His life only to take it up again (John 10:17) and become the Cornerstone who lives and reigns forever.
  - iii. Yes, at the very heart of our lives is the Cornerstone, the heart stone you could say.

V. **Living with Jesus as our cornerstone is simply living as God's children.**

- a. In other words, the Holy Spirit was given to us in Baptism and faith, and with that gift of grace, God lives in each of us.
  - i. We are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, who helps us to grow on the cornerstone of Christ.
- b. By the power of the Holy Spirit and Christ our Cornerstone...
  - i. Rather than seeing church as a social club, we see different people as an opportunity to welcome and connect with whoever walks through the doors.
  - ii. Instead of making political issues a dividing point, we see the kingdom of God as the point of our gathering and focus – which transcends all government.
  - iii. In contrast to seeing the pastor as the heart of the church and putting him on a pedestal, we take the Scripture seriously as we are the priesthood of all believers and that the church needs our involvement.
  - iv. As budgets and maintenance take time, we balance these things with eyes that look outward to the people who have no hope or a Savior in their lives.

- v. Rather than ignore the parts of God's Word that we don't like, we pray for willingness and the ability to be engaged by it and live our lives according to it.
- c. Everyone who believes in Jesus is a part of the building blocks of the Church... but there is only one Cornerstone... Jesus Christ.
  - i. By God's grace, He has given us the faith that keeps us from stumbling on Him, but instead, building on Him... the heart of our faith and the Rock of our salvation – Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Voelz, J. W., & Mitchell, C. W. (2019). Mark 8:27–16:20 (C. P. Giese, Ed.; pp. 867–883). Concordia Publishing House.