Mark Lesson 39 (2023)

**THE REJECTED STONE HAS BECOME THE CORNERSTONE**

*(Subtitle: “Marvelous and Wonderful!”)*

Mark 11:27-12:12

Key Verse: 12:10-11

**“**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.’”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the first thing he did was challenge the institutionalized Jewish religion by casting out people who were treating the holy place as a marketplace. He overturned the money changers’ tables and did not allow anyone to carry merchants through the temple courts. He also cursed the fig tree, which looked gorgeous but had no fruit, which was his symbolic demonstration to predict the coming judgment on the unbelieving nation Israel. In last week’s passage, Jesus taught his disciples to trust God no matter what happened to the world. He also instructed them on how to have faith in God: *1) They should overcome doubt, 2) They should learn to pray according to God’s will, and 3) They should learn to forgive others unconditionally.*

 In today’s passage, Jesus spoke to the Jewish religious leaders who questioned his authority in doing what he did in the temple courts (11:27-33). The first segment is the background that prompted Jesus to speak to them about the Parable of the Wicked Tenants. (12:1-12). The central point of Jesus’ Parable illustrates the Jewish religious leaders’ rejection of Jesus, the Son of God, who was sent to them, and the grave consequences that would follow. Jesus concluded the parable by quoting the Scripture from Psalm 118, implying that he is the Messiah, the Rejected stone the builders rejected, which has become the Cornerstone.

 Look at verses 27-30. “They arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders came to him. ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you authority to do this?’ Jesus replied, ‘I will ask you one question. Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John’s baptism – was it from heaven or human origin? Tell me!’”

The chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders constituted the three components of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin. They were the ones who were responsible for overseeing Israel’s religious affairs. So, after witnessing what Jesus did in the temple the previous day, they wanted to investigate. Fair enough! However, their ulterior motive was to find a legitimate foundation to arrest and get rid of him.

 In response to their questions on the origin of his authority, Jesus asked them if they believed that God was behind John’s ministry. By asking this question, Jesus put them in the corner because if they said that they thought God was behind John’s ministry, they had no choice but to acknowledge that God was behind Jesus’ ministry.

Look at verses 31-33. So, they discussed it among themselves and answered, *“We don’t know.”* Do you think they didn’t know who gave Jesus authority to clean the corrupted temple? Of course, they did. But they pretended not to know. They refused to accept it. They were lying. Why lie? It’s because of fear, the opposite of faith. They were afraid of losing their status and power. They felt threatened by Jesus’ authority. To their intentional pretension, Jesus answered, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

In the following passage, 12:1-12, Jesus spoke the Parable of the Wicked Tenants, aiming mainly at the religious leaders. Read verses 1-5. “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. 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 still sent many others; some of them beat, others killed.” In this parable, who does the owner of the vineyard represent? How about the vineyard? It symbolizes the Nation Israel. Whom do the tenants represent? The Jewish religious leaders, whom God had entrusted with the spiritual leaders over the people of Israel. Finally, who do the owner’s servants represent? The prophets God had sent throughout history to awaken his people but they were often mistreated and rejected and, in some cases, murdered. The main point of this section is the wicked and cruel treatment that Israel’s leaders had given the servants whom God had sent to them.

Read verses 6-8. “He had one left to send, a son whom he loved. He sent him last of all, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But the tenants said to one another, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’” The sending of the owner’s son was the supreme and final test for the tenants. Of course, the son represents Jesus, the beloved Son of God. But they decided to kill the son, thinking they could claim ownership of the vineyard if they got rid of the heir. The tenants threw the son out of the vineyard and then killed him. The killing of the owner’s son foreshadows the crucifixion of Jesus himself, as Jesus knew he would be rejected and murdered by these religious leaders. Even though Jesus used plain language in the parable, the parable exposes the grave sin of the religious leaders who were full of greed, wickedness, and self-deception. They were religious leaders but behaved as though God was dead by rejecting and killing God’s son as they did. We see institutionalized greed, hatred, and self-deception in the Jewish religious system. Systemic evil! It’s no wonder Jesus was so upset with them. After all, the tenants’ rejection of the owner’s son was equally a rejection of the owner, God.

Read verse 9. “What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” Here, Jesus warns the religious leaders about the consequences of their wicked sins and predicts their downfall. It reminds us of Romans 2:6-8, which states, “God ‘will repay each person according to what they had done.’ To those who, by persistence in doing good, seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger.” When we hear the words *“God’s wrath and anger,”* we think of God’s direct curse and judgment that may destroy wicked sinners. But evil people who constantly reject God and his truth will be killed by the poison of sin, not by God. Sin is deadly.

The First Epistle of John states that there is a sin that leads to death and a sin that does not. (1 John 5:16-18) Deadly sin is the sin of greed, wickedness, and self-deception – the spiritual poisons that lead people to death. Therefore, we should carefully examine our hearts and minds in the light of God’s truth and based on conscience to remove the poison of sin from us. 1 John 1:6-7 states, “If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” The blood of Jesus shed on the cross can cleanse any sinner from their sins and recreate a new heart and person.

When Jesus said that the vineyard owner would give the vineyard to others, he predicted the inclusion of the Gentile believers who would bear the fruit of faithfulness and obedience to God. The tenant’s killing of the son represents the culmination of Israel’s rebellion against God. History attests that God indeed took the vineyard from Israel and gave it to the Gentile believers until the appointed time. (Ro. 11:25)

Jesus concluded the parable by quoting Psalm 118:22-13. Read verses 10-11. “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’?” In these verses, Jesus implied that he, the Messiah, is the rejected stone, which had become the cornerstone of God’s New Temple, the eternal house of God.

We don’t know who wrote Psalm 118 and when it was included in the book of Psalms. The unknown psalmist might have had many stories to tell, most of which we are not sure. However, one thing we can be sure of is that God’s mysterious wisdom is portrayed in these phrases. “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” The Messiah would be rejected, but he would be the cornerstone.

Who would fit this specific prophecy? Moses? Elijah? John the Baptist? No. It’s only Jesus who would be rejected by men, killed, and would rise again in three days, as Jesus had predicted. Indeed, it’s marvelous in human eyes. Apostle Peter wrote much concerning Jesus the Cornerstone in his letter to the early Christians. 1 Peter 2:4-6 states, “As you come to him, the Living Stone – rejected by men 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.’”

***“The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”*** Think of our salvation in Christ Jesus, that brings us righteousness, holiness, and transformation through his grace. Who could think of this wisdom of salvation for all people? It’s deep, wide, and high beyond human logic, knowledge, or philosophy. Salvation by the grace of God is a great and wonderful wisdom from heaven. It’s God’s best gift for fallen humankind, both Jews and Gentiles.

Before meeting Christ personally, Paul was a devoutly religious person as a Pharisee. Yet, he was arrogant and exclusive due to his religious beliefs and selfish ambition. He especially hated Christians and considered them as enemies of God. In his zeal, he persecuted Christians and wanted to destroy the Church. But one day, he was struck by the light from heaven as he was on his way to arrest Christians in Damascus. He heard the voice from heaven, *“Saul, Saul! Why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?”* Saul asked. *“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,”* he replied*.* (Acts 9) Through his personal encounter with the Risen Jesus, Saul came to believe that Jesus is the Lord and Savior, the Messiah of the world. He became a powerful servant of Christ Jesus. He confessed in his letter, “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

He also told his spiritual son, Timothy, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason, I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might be displayed his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.” (1 Tim; 1:15)

IT'S TRULY AMAZING when I think of God’s grace in my life. I accepted Christ Jesus personally as my Savior and Lord while in college. By the grace of God, I am what I am. Praise Jesus, my Lord and Savior, who called me out of darkness into his wonderful light. I came to Chicago as an immigrant and missionary in 1981 and moved to New York in 1994. Despite my shortcoming and failures, God’s grace has always been with me; he blessed me abundantly, more than I could bear. Why did he bless me so much? He wanted to reveal his glory through his grace in my life. While preparing this sermon, I was reminded of 1 Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” Next year, I will turn 70. But I feel young. I don’t know how long I will live. But I want to rededicate myself to God’s redemptive work in New York and beyond for the rest of my life. The grace of forgiveness of sins, transformation, and everlasting life is marvelous*.* *“Oh, it’s wonderful. It is marvelous and wonderful. What he has done for this soul of mine! The half has never been told.”* (Lelia Naylor Morris, 1919)

Let me close the sermon. Jesus, the Son of God, was rejected by men. But God had made him the Cornerstone of his kingdom through his death and resurrection. Indeed, Christ Jesus is the source of salvation for all people. It’s marvelous. We will know it only through personal experience. The world we live in now is in darkness. Many live in fear, doubt, greed, hatred, anger, and self-deception. They are not happy but suffering from inner pains and wounds. They need to hear and accept the good news of God’s salvation.

God has chosen each of us. We are precious to him even though we may not think so. We are priests of the King Jesus. Even though we still have many shortcomings and sins, the Lord is working in us to make us whole, holy, and pure in his grace. May we share God’s marvelous and wonderful grace with the people around us so they can also experience his unique and extraordinary grace.