

JESUS IS THE CORNERSTONE

Luke 20:1-19

Key Verse: 20:17b

“...The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”

In the last event, Jesus entered Jerusalem as King, riding on a donkey. We call it The Triumphal Entry, which took place on Palm Sunday. Jesus had less than one week left to live. Luke chapters 20-21 tell us about Jesus' last teachings to the crowds. It was Tuesday. Jesus had only 3 full days left to live. What would he teach? In today's passage Jesus is questioned about his authority and he tells the Parable of the Tenants, prophesying his own death. Jesus would be rejected and killed. But God would establish Jesus as the key stone in God's salvation purpose and in human history. Let's listen to Jesus and be serious about accepting his teaching.

First, John's baptism and Jesus' authority (1-8). As we recall, after entering Jerusalem, Jesus went first to the temple and drove out those who were selling. **“It is written, he said to them, “ ‘My house will be a house of prayer’; but you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”** The leaders of the Jews in Jerusalem were furious and wanted to kill Jesus. But all the people liked Jesus, so they couldn't do anything.

Jesus had only 3 more full days to live. What would you do if you knew you had just 3 days to live? What is on your bucket list to do before you die? What did Jesus do? Look at verse 1. It says that **“Jesus was teaching the people in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news...”** From the beginning of his ministry to the last of his days, Jesus was teaching and proclaiming the good news of the word of God. To Jesus, teaching and proclaiming the word of God was the most important way to spend his life and to change the world. Jesus was sowing seeds of God's word in human hearts in hope and faith that the seed would grow and bear a great harvest to God in the future. Jesus' faith and hope were exactly right. Do you have hope and faith in teaching and proclaiming the word of God?

The Jewish leaders didn't like Jesus' teaching and preaching and his clearing of the temple merchants. They were the chief priests, teachers and elders, who came to Jesus saying, **“Tell us by what authority you are doing these things. Who gave you this authority?”**

People in authority don't like their authority to be questioned, especially if they were appointed or if they felt they earned their position. The Jewish chief

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priests had priestly authority as descendants of Aaron. Their authority was inherited. The teachers of the law had authority from their excellent learning. They earned it through hard study. The elders had authority by just hanging on to their faith and position long enough in the society. Their authority came from their age. How about Jesus? Jesus wasn't descended from Aaron or Levi but from Judah. Jesus didn't study in their schools or under their rabbis. Jesus was not old, but just over 30 years old. So Jesus didn't have authority from their sources. Then where did his authority come from?

Well even a common, uneducated person knew that Jesus' authority came from God. When Jesus healed the paralyzed man who was let down through the roof, Jesus said that he had authority to forgive sins, an authority which belongs only to God. Clearly, Jesus' power and wisdom came from God. Then why didn't the Jewish leaders accept Jesus' authority?

Obviously, Jesus was a threat to their authority. From their point of view, they had too much to lose if they accepted Jesus' authority. It meant they would have to give up their own authority to accept Jesus'. Would you be willing to give up your achievements if it was necessary in order to follow Jesus? Have you actually given up anything to follow Jesus? If you think you can be a disciple of Jesus without sacrificing anything for Christ, then you need to listen to Jesus' words in Luke 9:23, where Jesus said, **“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”** There is no easy road in following Jesus. Following Jesus is the way of suffering, self-denial and sacrifice. But it is the road to true blessing, blessedness, salvation and eternal life.

How did Jesus reply to their question? It would be appropriate for Jesus to say, “What? You must be kidding! Have you not seen the things I have done, the miracles from God? Have you not heard my teaching which is nothing but the truth of God? How can you ask about the origin of my authority?” Probably I would've said something like that. But Jesus did not. Rather, Jesus asked them a question.

Look at verses 3-4. He replied, **“I will also ask you a question. Tell me: John's baptism—was it from heaven, or of human origin?”** Jesus was the master of asking questions. Instead of lecturing or rebuking them, Jesus asked them a question about John's baptism. John's baptism was John's ministry to prepare people for the Messiah. The reason these leaders did not accept Jesus was related to the reason they rejected John. Jesus' authority and John's baptism both came from God. But the Jewish leaders refused to accept this. Why? Simply

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because they loved the world and the position and wealth that they had achieved on earth.

Luke 7:29-30 explains in another way why the Jewish leaders didn't accept Jesus. It says, **“All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, acknowledged that God's way was right, because they had been baptized by John. But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves, because they had not been baptized by John.”**

The Jewish leaders did not believe in Jesus because they did not accept John's message. What was John's message? It was simply, **“Repent and believe the good news of the kingdom of God.”** Repent means to change your mind, which leads to a change of life. Believe the good news of God's kingdom means to turn from a worldly dream and focus to God and to listen to his coming messenger, the Messiah. It means to believe in Jesus. To believe in Jesus means to accept his teachings and commands above my own ideas and plans and dreams.

John's baptism: was it from heaven or of human origin? It was an easy question to answer. Any common person knew that John's baptism was from heaven, that is, from God. Even a child could answer correctly. So what did they say? They discussed it among themselves and said, **“If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Why didn't you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet.”** They didn't want to accept John since that would mean they must repent and believe. But they didn't believe and they didn't want to repent. However, to say that John's ministry was of human origin—even though that's what they really wanted to say—would get them in big trouble with the people, who accepted John as a true prophet from God. They were afraid that the people would kill them. So they dodged Jesus' question. Jesus gave them two choices but they made a third: **“We don't know. We don't know where it was from.”** It was a safe, uncommitted answer. But it only expressed their ignorance and fear. Jesus said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” They didn't answer Jesus' question, so it would do them no good for Jesus to answer their question.

It is clear from this that a person can be either against Jesus or for Jesus. There is no middle ground or neutral position. If you are not for Jesus, you are against Jesus. Many people prefer the third option: I'm not sure. We call this view Agnosticism. Literally it means “no knowledge” or “I don't know.” It's a safe, and

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perhaps honest answer. But it's also an uncommitted answer, like someone who goes through life saying, "I think I'd like to get married someday, but I just want to shop around for a spouse instead." Or it's like a person saying, "There are so many religions that I don't think we can ever know for sure which one is most true or uniquely true, so I'd rather not make any choice."

D.L.Moody made a decision to try to win at least one soul to Christ every day. Sometimes this meant getting out of bed to go and share the gospel with someone. One day Moody was riding in a carriage in the rain to preach at a meeting. As they rode on, he told the driver to stop, got out and asked a man walking in the rain, "Where are you going?" The man said, "To hear Moody preach." Moody replied, "So am I, get in my carriage." After Moody preached, he asked all the Christians to stand and the man he had met in the rain stood up. Moody asked him, "Are you a Christian?" The man replied, "I was saved in a carriage tonight coming here. A man prayed for me. I guess that was you, Mister." This is one example of the fruit of Moody's decision to speak to one person a day about Christ.

Have you made your choice for Jesus Christ based on his life of power, love and wisdom? If you have, do you know someone who needs Christ? Have you shared the gospel with them, or invited them to church or Bible study? If not, it could be the best thing you ever do for them. Many of us here are following Jesus and living for him because someone had the courage and love to invite us to study the Bible or to come to church to learn of Jesus. If you believe that John's baptism and Jesus' authority came from heaven, I want to challenge you: before next Sunday, will you speak to even one person and invite them, to learn of Jesus? You don't have to be weird about it. Just show them love in Jesus' name, even if they say no.

Second, the Parable of the Tenants (9-19). Jesus went on to tell the crowd an ominous parable, the Parable of the Tenants: **"A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out."**

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This parable doesn't seem to be realistic. It sounds like a story from a horror movie. What tenants would be stupid and evil enough to do this? Can you imagine a modern scenario: An apartment landlord sends his manager to collect rent from some tenants. The tenants punch him in the face and say, "Get out of here!" Ok, maybe the manager was rude or harsh. So the owner says another manager, a nicer one. That one they invite in for a drink. But they strip him of his coat, slap him around and kick him out, running. The third one is hospitalized by their violence. This is unthinkable isn't it? Actually, things like this really do happen. I won't tell any stories.

So who do the owner, the managers and the tenants represent? It becomes more obvious when we finish the story. Look at verse 13. **"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'"**

What? Is the owner crazy? Isn't it obvious what will happen to his son? It is shocking that the owner was so patient and hopeful to see the tenants change and do the right thing. The owner just wanted rent, or, some of the fruit. He wanted the tenants to acknowledge the owner's generosity and be thankful and show their gratitude. Who knows, then the owner might even reduce their rent or have a BBQ with them or give them a promotion.

"But when the tenants saw the son, they fell into a great delusion. They talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him."

Surprisingly, they thought the owner was dead or too weak to do anything to them. So they thought, if we just get rid of the owner's son, the vineyard is all ours! So they did the unthinkable: they killed the owner's son, so that he couldn't even go back and report to his father.

By now it should be clear what the parable represents. God is the owner. His people, the Jews, were the tenants. The servants sent to receive some of the fruit were the prophets. The son is Jesus Christ. God gave his people Israel the greatest privilege to tend God's vineyard. This vineyard story is echoed in Isaiah chapter 5. Isaiah 5:7 says, **"The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress."**

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God sent his servants the prophets to them, but they did not listen. Why not? Because they chose to live their lives in their own way, not God's way. God's way was too restrictive, boring and no fun they thought. 2 Kings 17:13-14 says, **"The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: 'Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your ancestors to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets.' But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their ancestors, who did not trust in the LORD their God."**

Finally, God the Father took a great risk. He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world, hoping that his people would accept Him. In the parable, Jesus expressed the hope of God for his people saying, **"What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him."** But it was not be. God's own people did not receive Jesus, except for a few. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14, **"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."**

But before you fall into anti-Semitism and start blaming Jews, you must realize that all human beings have failed, just like the Jews, beginning with the first man and woman, Adam and Eve. From the beginning, all people have rebelled against God, deciding to do things their way, instead of God's way. All have sinned, dishonored and disobeyed God. All have fallen short of God's standard of righteousness. In our sins and rebellion, we also sent Jesus to a horrible death, for Jesus paid the price for our ransom and redemption. Jesus took the punishment we deserve.

Apostle Peter said it this way, **"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God"** (1Pe 3:18a). Apostle Paul wrote, **"And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again"** (2Co 5:15).

Jesus ended the parable asking, **"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."** Now is the day of salvation. Now is the time to repent and believe the good news. But the day will come when that time will be over and God's judgment will fall. It's called the Day of the Lord, or Judgment Day. God's judgment is inevitable. Again, Paul wrote, **"For we must all appear before the judgment seat"**

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of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad” (2Co 5:10). God doesn’t want people to face his righteous and just punishment. 2 Peter 3:9 says, “...he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

When the people heard Jesus’ parable, they said, “**God forbid!**” It was a terrible story. They did not want to lose God’s privileges. But they could not accept Jesus’ warning. So Jesus looked directly at them and asked, “**Then what is the meaning of that which is written: “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.**”

Jesus quoted Psalm 118:22, “**The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.**” In masonry, stones are chosen that fit well in with others, like bricks. If a brick is an odd size, it is thrown out into the junk pile. However, there is a very special stone called the cornerstone. This stone is the most important stone in the whole building for it itself is the foundation stone for all the others.

Jesus is that stone. He was rejected by his own people, because he was not what they wanted. They wanted a king who would destroy their enemy Rome and then give them what they wanted. Jesus was not that kind of king. Jesus came to destroy the power of sin and death. Jesus came to give us not what we want, but what we need—salvation, eternal life and an inheritance in the kingdom of God. Jesus was rejected by people but chosen by God. God gave proof of this by raising Jesus from the dead. Peter and Paul both understood this, calling Jesus the cornerstone. Peter said in Acts 4:11, “**Jesus is ‘the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone.’**” Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:20, “**...built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.**”

Jesus also said, “**Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.**” To judge Jesus or to be judged by Jesus means disaster for anyone. The right choice is to be in right standing or right relationship with Jesus. It is to trust in Him. 1 Peter 2:4-8 says it better than I can: “**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**

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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.’ They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.”

Jesus’ parable did not appeal to the chief priests and teachers of the law. Rather, they looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they could do nothing because they were afraid of the people.

There’s an important question to ask yourself in light of the Parable of the Tenants: Do you know how blessed and privileged you are by God? It is tragic to not realize God’s grace and blessings and privileges. Such a person is spiritually blind and evil, like the tenants in the parable. We must be thankful for God’s gifts, not envious of what God has given others.

Jesus’ authority and John’s baptism came from God. Jesus was rejected by the Jews and by us in our sins. But he became the cornerstone of God’s salvation work and history. Anyone who trusts in Jesus will never be put to shame. This is the gospel of God. All people have the choice to accept it or reject it. Believing the gospel means thanking God for salvation, purpose and direction in Jesus Christ. Rejecting the gospel is folly that leads to destruction and condemnation. Jesus is the cornerstone. Is your life and confidence built on him?