



Sermon Title: Cornerstone

Mark 12:1-12

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Good morning, everyone.

Good morning.

All right. I didn't hear much. Good morning, everyone.

Good morning.

All right. Just making sure you're still there. My name is Rich Leatherberry. Good morning to those of you worshipping with us online. I'm the pastor for outreach. I want to start with our scripture and then I'll lead us into prayer. This scripture is from Mark 12:1-2. "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 sent still another and that one they killed. He sent many others, some of them they beat, others they killed. 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.' So they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. 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.' And 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."

So Jesus, we want to thank You for this Word because it is good and it is right and it is the best. So Father, we pray that You would use these moments now to help us understand what you would have for us today, and we pray this in Your name, Jesus, amen. Well, I want to start this morning with a question. Who or what has made you the person that you are today and who are you becoming? Now think about that for a little bit. Who or what has made you the person that you are today and who are you becoming? Now I ask that question because as independent as we want to think that we are, we have all been influenced and shaped by different people, by different things today, by the people that we want to be like or to impress, by what we watch or scroll through and believe, by who we know and love, by what we fear and avoid. All these things and more have shaped our character, our soul, who we are, and the trajectory that our lives are going in.

Each of us is growing, changing, becoming. That's the way God made the universe. So the question really isn't, are you changing? The question is, who are you becoming and will you like the person you will be five years from now, 10 years from now, 30 years from now? Who or what has made you the person that you are today and who are you becoming? Now last year I received a call from my old next door neighbor's sister. He was my best friend growing up until my family moved away. We hung out every day as kids, watched cartoons, played baseball, rode bikes. We loved to do the same things together, got in trouble for the same things together. We were best friends. That was a really long time ago. Now, his sister called me to say that their father had died and asked if I would come and officiate the grave site. Well, I said yes, and I was really looking forward to seeing my old friend again, but it was super disappointing. He'd become this grumpy guy and was totally dissatisfied with the way that his life had turned out.

He wasn't the guy that I knew as a kid. It was like, "Hey, man, where did you go?" You ever know someone like that? So who or what has made you the person that you are today and who are you becoming? That's one of the questions that this parable is asking us today. So let's take a look at this text and see what it means for us today. It starts off Verse 1. Jesus is telling this parable, 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. Now, Jesus told parables because they were simple stories drawn on real life that had usually just a single spiritual meaning. They hooked people in because they really talked about life as people knew it in Palestine so people would remember the parable and they would remember its spiritual meaning. A little bit different than say this sermon that you're probably going to forget by the time you have lunch today.

The landowner provides everything that these farmers need to flourish. He gives them land, good grapevines, a wall to keep it safe, a winepress, everything. The characters in

this story represent specific persons. The landlord represents God, Israel's the vineyard. The religious leaders are the farmers, the prophets are the servants, and Jesus is the Son. By starting with everything the landowner provided, Jesus is giving us a clear picture of God's grace. God generously provides everything the farmers need to flourish. They don't earn it, they don't deserve it, that's grace. Grace is a hard concept for many of us to believe in these days, primarily because we live in a world of ungrace, right? We live in a world of paybacks and getting even where people use our mistakes against us in order to climb the social ladder or the org chart. So it's hard to imagine that God doesn't in some way measure our own worthiness and somehow keep track of our moral failures. But grace is the primary way God relates to us. God is the gracious giver who gives and gives and gives, so grace is a gift we receive.

Deserve, has nothing to do with it. Grace is God never giving up, never giving in. Grace is second and third chances, forgiveness, never giving up until we would finally turn around and recognize our deep need for God. Grace is a fresh start, washed clean, Jesus' death on the cross. Grace is God changing us, making us fuller, richer, better, more courageous, showing up in unexpected ways, filling us with fresh experiences of His love. Where do you need God's grace in your life today? What's going on? Don't leave here today without asking God for His grace in that area of your life. And to help you, we'll have prayer ministers up here after the service who would love to pray with you and for you. Takes me to Verses 2-5, "At harvest time, he sent a servant to the farmers to collect 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."

Now what a crazy turn in the story, right? The generosity and provision of the landlord is reciprocated by rejection and bloody violence, and it's at this point that the parable creates tension in us and we wonder, does God's grace mean that God does nothing about injustice in our world? Do bad people get away with doing bad things in this world? Will the parable's going to answer that in just a little bit, which brings me to Verses 6, 7 and 8. "He had one left to send, a son whom he loved. He sent him last all saying, 'They will respect my son,' but the farmers said to one another, 'This is the heir.' So they took him and killed him. Now the son is the last one to be sent, and it seems really, if you think about it, rather naive and foolish on the landowner's part to send his son in the first place as if the farmers are going to do something different.

You'd think that the landowner would keep the son home where it's safe, and you'd think the son would look at the landowner and say, "I'm not going over there," 'cause he knows exactly what's going to happen. But the landowner's love means that he will not give up even at risk of his son; not on those farmers, not on you, not on me, not on this crazy broken world. And the son's love means that he will be obedient to the father's will even at risk of his own life. God's extravagant love is more than we can imagine. God holds nothing back and Jesus' Son shows the same love by giving His life as a sacrifice

for our sin. Jesus paid the price for all of our sin, past, present, and future. He gave His life for us. It's a whole life soul policy when you think about it. He died the death that we owe in order that we can live the life that. He lives right now, which brings me to Verse 9.

"What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." Now, God is gracious and this parable has made that super clear. But God is also the just judge, and that's a side of God's character that we don't like to talk about much. But God cannot be loving without also being just. Love requires justice, and the penalty for murder in those days was the death penalty, and so the farmers are put to death. God will judge the unjust wicked farmers of our world when Jesus comes back again, and on that day, God will finally and fully make right what has gone wrong with this world. In the end, God comes to judge and His justice will reign, but Jesus doesn't stop there. I want you to see it. The parable does not end with judgment. It ends with a promise. God will give his precious vineyard to someone else who will care for and love the vineyard, which brings us to the bottom line meaning of this parable in Verses 10 through 11.

Jesus says, "Haven't you read this scripture? 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes.'" Now, Jesus is quoting from Psalm 118, and I think Colin, you read that a little bit earlier. The parable was read during the Passover and it celebrated God's saving acts. So Jesus is totally thinking about Psalm 118 as He's talking about this parable, because in just a few days, He will take his last Passover meal with his disciples. He will be arrested. He will be beaten and crucified on a cross to save us from death and sin. Now, the religious leaders, they were the Old Testament scholars of the day. So when Jesus says, "Haven't you read this scripture?" He's challenging their scholarship tradition had taught the King David was writing about himself when he wrote this Psalm, but Jesus by connecting himself to the son in the parable is saying that this Psalm is not descriptive of King David. It's actually prophetic of the coming Messiah. The stone the builders rejected is Jesus.

He is the Son who gives his life. He is the Savior they are looking for. The Lord has done this and it is marvelous in our sight, but the religious leaders, all it does is just make them angrier and so they walk away, and that's where this story ends. Now, there's a lot going on in this story and in this parable that some of you might not be ready to agree with. You're checking things out, you're searching, and that is great. Keep on searching. God is also searching after you. And there's a lot in this parable like showing us about God's grace, but the parable is mostly about Jesus as Lord. And through the resurrected Jesus, God will build a new community, the church, and Jesus will be the cornerstone. Now, the cornerstone was always the strongest stone in the building because it supported the walls. It also had to be the straightest stone because it really formed the lines that were used to position the stones that were built on top of it. So the cornerstone was the most important stone. It was the strongest stone. It made the building strong.

It made the building straight. You get the metaphor, which brings us back to our question, who or what has made you who you are today? And who are you becoming or to use the metaphor that we've just been looking at, who are you building your life on and who are you becoming as a result? Making Jesus our cornerstone means that we're building our life on Him. He's shaping our values. He's shaping our beliefs. He's shaping our behaviors and the reward for all that is, well, it's Jesus. We get to experience more of His life, what Jesus called the abundant life or as former Whitworth Professor Dale Bruner translates it, "The life that is really life." And the fruit of the spirit of this life, it begins to fill us more and more; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control more and more. So how do we make Jesus the cornerstone of our life and experience this life that is really life? First, to make Jesus the cornerstone of our life, we have to trust Jesus to lead us to the life that we're looking for.

Now, recently I was at Lake Tahoe with my wife and I overheard this conversation where some people were talking and debating actually about the existence of God. And I tried really hard not to listen in and be this creepy listening guy, but I did manage to hear them as they concluded. And they came to the place where they all admitted that there might be a God, but that Christians were wrong and Jesus was wrong when He said that He was the only way to know this God. And I wouldn't expect them to take Jesus seriously or to think he was right since they weren't Jesus followers. But more and more, people aren't taking Jesus seriously either not as a spiritual leader, not as the smartest person to have ever lived, not as the one who knows how life should be because He created life. Dallas Willard who wrote several books about following Jesus once said, "What lies at the heart of the astonishing disregard of Jesus found in the moment-to-moment existence of multitudes of professing Christians is a simple lack of respect for Him."

The first step we take to build our lives on Jesus is to trust Him and to keep on trusting Him. In spite of whatever risks you feel like you're taking in order to trust Him, trust that Jesus is who He says He is. Trust that He really did the things that He did. Trust the scriptures or eyewitness accounts of people who encountered Him. Trust His disciples, who saw and heard everything about Jesus. They were right there with Him, and all they could do was profess, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Now, Augustine once said, "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You." And I've shared that with you before. It's only when we completely surrender and give our allegiance to Jesus, only when we follow Him as Lord, only then will we find the life that we're looking for. Second, to make Jesus the cornerstone of our life, learn to be in two places at once. Now, before you panic, Jesus isn't asking us to do something more than we're already doing.

This is good news for East Siders. What He's asking is that we would do what we are doing, but just do it differently. One of the first scriptures I ever memorized was from Proverbs 3:5-6. Some of you may know this, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding and in all your ways acknowledge Him and He will make

your path straight." The word acknowledge is from the Hebrew word yada. It means to be in an intimate relationship. It means to know someone deeply, to be known by them deeply, Jesus with you and you with Him. Driving in the madness of traffic, being also with Him. Changing your crying kid's diaper, being also with Him.

Plowing through your inbox, firing off responses, being also with Him. Listening to your favorite podcast or scrolling through social media, being also with Him. Having lunch with a friend, being also with Him. Practice being in two places at once, but it doesn't come naturally, does it? When someone cuts me off on the freeway and without any consideration of how important I think I am and how entitled I believe I am to a lane completely clear in front of me, the last person I'm thinking about in that moment is Jesus. Anybody else have this? Just me. Right? It takes practice, being fully present to the craziness of our world and also present with Jesus. Learning to live inward as much as we live outward.

Letting the light of Jesus love and grace within us guide and direct what we say and what we do in the moments that we find ourselves in. We have to train our mind to return to Him so that our spirit will return too. So to make Jesus the cornerstone of our lives, we need to trust Him to lead us to the life that we're looking for. We need to learn to live in two places. And third, make your body a temple. Now, the temple was a place where heaven and earth overlap, and there was no other place like that until Jesus rose from the dead and sent His spirit to fill us who follow Him. So Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit that you receive from God? And that lives in you. You are not your own." Wow, no pressure there, Paul. Thank you very much.

But being a disciple of Jesus is about turning our body into a display of what the kingdom of God life looks like. We become previews of coming attractions for what God wants for people of every nation, tribe and tongue. Robert Munger wrote a devotional many years ago called *My Heart: Christ's Home*, and it was one of the first things that I ever read that helped me know that Jesus wanted to be the foundation of every area of my life, and not just a few areas. Like not just my church life, but every area of my life. Our heart, he said, is like a home with many rooms, and the dining room is the room that it's where our desires and wants are. The family room is what we watch and what we do for entertainment. The bedroom is our sexual lives. The living room is the place where we hang with Jesus, how much and how long.

The rec room is what we do for fun and entertainment and the junk drawers is the stuff we need to throw away. When we make our whole body a temple for Jesus, we invite Jesus into every one of those spaces. Not to shame us, but to shine the light of His love and truth into those spaces, and then to trust and obey what He's asking us to do so the atmosphere of His heaven will fill every space in our heart. Let Him shape you. Make your body a temple. So here's your homework. Each day this week, ask God to show you one thing that you can do to make Jesus more of the cornerstone in your life. And for those of you who want bonus points, ask Jesus to show you one thing you need to let go

of. No other figure in history before or after Jesus has been as influential. Now, 2000 years later, there's nearly 2 billion people who claim to follow Him.

His followers back then knew that he was more than just a good person, more than just a way among many ways to know God, more than a new morality to teach other people about. He was the one they placed their trust in, the one they worshiped, the one they built their lives on. Only Jesus pays the price, the penalty for our sin. Only Jesus conquers death. Only Jesus rescues and restores. Only Jesus provides the life that is really life, abundant life filled up and overflowing. That's the trajectory our lives go in when we build our lives on Jesus. My hope is built in nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness, Christ alone, cornerstone, amen. So Jesus, we thank You for this life that You offer. It is grace. Would You come, would You fill our every space in our hearts more and more? Would You show us how to make You more our cornerstone and to build our lives on You? We love You, Jesus. We welcome You. It's in Your name we pray, amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- What do you do to relax, find comfort or relief in your life?
- What's one thing you heard from this sermon, or from other teachings on discipleship at Belpres, that you can do to experience more of the presence of Jesus in your life?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.