

+ Luke 20:9-19 + A Time for Giving Up Arrogance + 5th Sunday in Lent + 17 March 2013 +

How could they do it? The owner had worked so hard and had poured so much money into his vineyard. The land was hilly. The soil was rocky. He had to clear rocks and stones to terrace the hillside. In spite of the rocks, the soil was rich with minerals for the grapevines. Surely he'd get a good crop, but first he had to buy the vines and plant them. He had to dig out a winepress for the grape harvest. He even put a wall around the vineyard and built a watchtower to keep out any who might steal his grapes.

After he planted the vineyard, the owner ***"rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time."*** It was time for a long vacation, so the owner took a long trip to another country, while the farmers tended and harvested his crops. ***"At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard."*** For good reason, he wanted to get his rightful share of the grapes produced in his own vineyard. The workers would be able to sell the rest for themselves.

...But that's not what happened. The tenants beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. Why would they do that? Somewhere along the way they got in their heads the foolishly arrogant idea that this vineyard was going to be theirs. After all, they'd been doing all the "hard work" while the owner was out of the country. They didn't see any reason he should get any of the harvest or any of the profits from their work.

Nevertheless, the owner remained patient with them. He sent another servant, who was beaten, ***"treated shamefully"***, and sent away empty-handed. The owner sent still another servant. That servant was beaten so badly ***"they wounded him and threw him out."*** Their arrogance kept increasing. Now if we were in that owner's sandals, I'm sure we probably would have had the police escorting those rude and violent renters to a stay in the county jail, but that wasn't how this owner operated.

No, in a remarkable display of long-suffering patience, the owner gave them one more chance. He recalled how more and more violence had come to each new servant, but he thought to himself, ***"What shall I do? I'll send my son, whom I love; perhaps they'll respect him."*** Why wouldn't they? What amazing patience...only to be met with the height of arrogance! Why would those tenants listen to the son, if they had rejected his father? When they caught sight of the owner's son, ***"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."*** How foolish they had become! In their arrogance, they killed the son, but no inheritance would ever come their way, because they finally pushed the owner's patience too far. There would be no more patience for those wicked tenants, only wrath and death and the vineyard given to others to tend.

When Jesus first told this story, it terrified some and infuriated others. It was pretty clear that the owner referred to God, the tenants the people of Israel, the servants the Old Testament prophets, and the Son was Jesus. His listeners could only gasp, ***"May this never be!"***, but Jesus confronted them with their sin when he 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, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."*** That stone, of course, was Jesus himself, but woe to anyone who arrogantly rejects him. All who reject Christ will eventually be broken or crushed by his wrath.

At the same time, Jesus infuriated his enemies by unmasking their own arrogant folly. So they ***"looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people."*** Only days later their fear of the people would no longer hold back their wicked plans, but eventually their foolish arrogance would also bring down God's wrath on them with destruction.

Jesus told this parable only a couple days before he was put to death, but it's still a parable that you and I need to hear. "...But that's not me!", you might object. "I don't attack God's prophets. I come to church to listen to pastor, no matter how boring his sermon is. I give fruits back to God, at least what I have left over. I belong to a church body that teaches God's Word in its truth and purity, even if I'm not always sure what that means. I'm not some Pharisee attacking Jesus...", but yet the Savior's warning for any who might reject him or his teaching still rings true for us today.

We dare not be so arrogant to think that we couldn't reject him! Remember Jesus' audience! His enemies were the theologians and chief priests of the people. If they could reject him, when they should've known better, could not you or I? Remember they followed a long line of people who had rejected God's Word, his messengers, and ultimately his Messiah. Couldn't that be said of our own generation? Remember you and I are children of Adam, who rejected his gracious and holy God for Satan and death. Remember that by nature

“the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so.” (Romans 8:7)
Remember whose foolish sins and hostility toward God sent Jesus to the cross—yours and mine.

Consider what blessings God has given you and yet have been despised or taken for granted. Have you ever taken God’s Word lightly? When was the last time you cracked open your Bible at home or with a group in Bible study? Did it literally crack because it was never broken in? Have you ever taken for granted the life-giving words of the absolution—***“I forgive you all your sins...”*** or even ignored them when they were spoken over you earlier in the service? Have you ever rejected a strong admonition for a sin you love to commit? When it comes to what God’s Word has to say, have you ever thought to yourself, “I don’t want to hear that because that doesn’t make sense to me or I don’t want to do that or I don’t want to be kept from doing that or I don’t like that”? In doing so, can any of us honestly claim that we have not plotted with the tenants of this sinful world in raising our hands against the Son? Can any of us say we are not guilty of joining Jesus’ enemies in raising the hammer to pound the nails into his flesh? Can any of us honestly say we do not deserve the Master’s eternal condemnation?

How long does God’s patience last for the arrogant? How long does God’s patience last for those who think they’re good with God because they come from a Christian family or belong to a Christian congregation or some other superficial reason? To think we’re good with God for such reasons is simply the height of arrogance, but Jesus’ parable reminds us that God’s patience can come to an end if we reject him and his Word. Woe to any who thinks they could never do so, when even the builders rejected the Cornerstone!

Amazingly that same God is still merciful and still patient with us. Thanks be to God that he has not rejected us for our foolish arrogance, but instead puts on display his amazing grace in all its glorious beauty through Christ!

You see it in the patient love and care of the owner. That, my friends, is a picture of the long-suffering love of your gracious and holy God. He didn’t need to keep sending his prophets to people who rejected him. He didn’t need to give up the life of his Son for a world that rejected him. He doesn’t need to show all that love for sinners like you and me, but in his grace, in his long-suffering love, he does. He provides the opportunity for our ears to hear his Word, for his Holy Spirit to work faith in our hearts through the good news of a Savior from our sins of arrogance and rejection. He provided the opportunity for his Holy Spirit to work through water and the Word to cleanse your heart and make you a member of his family through faith in his Son.

You see it in the willing sacrifice of his Son. You’ve seen it all along this Lenten season as Jesus took on each of those familiar sins that come so easily to us. In all that, you see his gracious love for you. You saw it when he took on Satan and proved himself to be your Savior without the fatal flaw of sin. You saw it when the Savior resolved to boldly embrace the cross in spite of the pain and difficulty it would bring him. You saw it in the Savior who came to fulfill God’s every promise and provide you with real security from this life to life eternal. You saw it in his love for the absolutely unworthy, forgiving both gross sin and subtle self-righteousness. You’ve seen it all along, and see it even here in the midst of our selfish arrogance. Jesus knew what was coming only a couple days later. Jesus knew it and still went through it all, because his love compelled him to keep making his way toward suffering and the cross and death in spite of the arrogant rejection of his own people and the world he had created.

That same enduring love leads the Savior to abandon his tomb on Easter that you and I might live. That love gives us hope, because ***“the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”*** as he makes us the holy, ***“living stones”*** (1 Peter 2:5) of his one, holy Christian Church. That love moves Jesus to give us his body and blood with bread and wine for us to touch and taste and see his forgiveness for us. That love gives us the hope of heaven in the end, not hope based on some superficial reason in this life, but real hope based on the proof of his love at the cross and in the empty tomb.

Who of us deserves such love from the Savior? Not a one of us. After all, the rag pile of shredded sins that each of us carries has grown these past five weeks, and our own foolish arrogance only makes it heavier, but yet the Lord in his mercy does not leave us to bear that burden forever. Travel to the cross once more and leave the shredded rags of those favorite sins with your loving Savior, and in his undying, indescribable, undeserved grace, find relief and rest for your weary soul. Amen.