

The Cornerstone

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[0 : 00] You may be seated. Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's Word to you today.

A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here, and we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community.

And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced there's no one so good, they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in His Word.

We're continuing our series in the Gospel of Mark, and you'll remember that the Gospels tell the story of Jesus and His life and His death and His resurrection. And we are continuing the story we began a few weeks ago, which is the story of Holy Week.

You'll remember day one of Holy Week, Sunday. Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey, and then He finishes out the day by inspecting the temple. And then Monday, He shows right back up.

[1 : 11] He saw all the things that were going on in the temple, and so He curses the fig tree, then cleanses the temple. And then day three, Tuesday, in the morning, they're heading out, and they see that the fig tree's been withered all the way to the root, and He talks about the mountains being cast into the sea by great faith.

And so that takes us to today's passage. Now, His cleansing of the temple in chapter 11, verse 18, actually sets the stage for what's about to happen in this passage, and the passages to follow because He has finally sort of thrown down the gauntlet and let the religious leaders know He is here for a conflict.

He's come in as the king without apology in His triumphal entry. He's come in as the one to cleanse the temple. And so He has truly taken the baseball bat to the bee's nest.

And so that's why we see the religious leaders coming after Him now. The focus of the Gospels, of course, is on Jesus' second coming, or His first coming.

But as we look at this passage, we're also going to see Him hint at, look forward to talk about His second coming as well. And so as we jump into this passage, we're at Mark chapter 11, starting verse 27.

[2 : 27] This is the map. This is where we're headed. I'm going to tell you the story. And after we talk about the story, I'm going to tell you three things. Okay? Story, three things. With that, I invite you to turn with me in God's Word.

You can turn in your worship guide. You can turn on your phone. You can turn in your Bible. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's Word. And God tells us that His Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, which means that He has not left us to stumble alone in the dark, but instead He's given us His Word to show us the way to go.

And so that's why we read now Mark chapter 11, starting at verse 27. And they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests and the scribes and the elders came to Him.

And they said to Him, By what authority are you doing these things? Or who gave you this authority to do them? Jesus said to them, I will ask you one question.

Answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me. And they discussed it with one another, saying, If we say from heaven, He will say, Why then did you not believe Him?

[3 : 41] But shall we say from man? They were afraid of the people, for they all heard that John really was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, We do not know.

And Jesus said to them, Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. Chapter 12. And He began to speak to them in parables. A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower and leased it to tenants and went into another country. When the season came, He sent a servant to the tenants to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again He sent to them another servant and they struck him on the head and treated him shamefully.

And He sent another and him they killed. And so with many others. Some they beat and some they killed. Verse 6. He had still one other, a beloved son.

Finally, He sent him to them saying, They will respect my son. But those tenants said to one another, This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours.

[4 : 53] And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others.

Have you not read this scripture? The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes.

And they were seeking to arrest Him but feared the people for they perceived that He had told the parable against them. So they left Him and went away. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this passage of God's Word.

Our Father in Heaven, the psalmist asks you in Psalm 119 to open His eyes that He would behold wondrous things out of your law.

And we ask the same thing this morning. We know that without your help, we can't understand your Word. And so we ask that you would send your Holy Spirit now, that you would give us clarity in our minds, you'd give us tenderness in our hearts, that we would be able to hear and receive everything that you've written in your Word, that you would cast a spotlight on Jesus for us so we would see His beauty and His glory and His holiness and His love, and that we'd follow after Him with faith and joy and obedience.

[6 : 16] We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. As we begin this story, I mentioned we're doing it against the backdrop of Jesus' confrontation that He's already had with the religious leaders.

First of all, He ticks them off by having His triumphal entry and being willing to say, yes, He is in fact the King. And then to add insult to injury, He goes and cleanses the temple of those who are selling things and exchanging money there.

And so that helps us understand as we begin this confrontation, the scribes and the elders and the chief priests ask Him, verse 28, by what authority are you doing these things?

These things here is a reference to everything that's come before. By what authority are you rolling into the temple, turning over tables, driving out money changers? I mean, you're acting like you own the place.

And so what gives you the nerve? What gives you the right to come in and behave this way? Jesus turns it back on them and He says, look, I'm gonna ask you a question.

[7 : 20] And the question Jesus asks them is not random here. He is saying, essentially, the answer to my question is the answer to your question. Now, this might sound foreign, but we actually do the same thing today.

So if you were to ask me, Matthew, are we having church on Sunday? I might say, is the sky blue? Do bears poop in the woods?

Yes, of course we're having church on Sunday. The answer to my question is the answer to your question. This is what Jesus is pushing them with.

In other words, John's authority is my authority. If you understand John, you will understand me. If you know what authority he acted under, you will know what authority I acted under.

verse 28 or verse 29, verse 30, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? And so Jesus might have well asked them, is my authority, do you think it's from heaven or from man?

[8 : 25] Of course, we have this revelation of where their hearts truly are. Verse 33, we do not know. And so Jesus says, basically, I'm wasting my time here.

You didn't understand John, you're not gonna understand me. You didn't recognize John, you're not gonna recognize me. You didn't repent when John told you to repent, you're not going to repent when I tell you to repent.

You are not asking sincere questions. You're not seeking understanding. You're here just to trick me and trap me. And so this is a waste of my time.

There's no time on my calendar for this sort of conflict. In fact, they've already played their hands. They've revealed where their hearts truly are. They are not interested in truth.

They're interested in power and reputation, what serves them best. Truth is irrelevant since their concern is self-protection. They're trying to trap Jesus, not to learn from Jesus.

[9 : 27] And really what Jesus is about to do here, he's about to return to the lesson of the fig tree. We talked about a few weeks ago from chapter 11, that this is all leaf, no fig.

The religious leaders are all show, no substance. And while Jesus has told them he's not going to answer their question, he then turns around and proceeds to answer their question, except he does it in the form of a story, of a parable.

Remember the question is by what authority? That word authority repeats over and over again between verses 27 and 33. And so Jesus now decides to tell them a story about authority, the story of the vineyard.

Now you may be familiar, you may remember from chapter four, when Jesus spoke in parables, often he would need to provide this explanation afterwards to the disciples. He would pull them aside into his private gathering to help them understand what it was he was actually talking about. In this incidence though, there is no need for such a thing. Jesus has burning clarity. In fact, his clarity is so burning, verse 12, we're told, instead of being confused immediately, these religious leaders understood exactly what Jesus was saying.

[10 : 39] They knew, they perceived that he had told the parable against them. easy for the religious leaders to understand, also easy for us to understand.

It's not an accident that we read from Isaiah chapter five this morning, which presents this image of Israel as a vineyard. And this image shows up not just in Isaiah chapter five, but in other portions throughout the Old Testament.

And so it was easily recognizable that when we're talking about a vineyard, we're talking about Israel. Then we have these tenants. These tenants are supposed to watch the vineyard for its owner.

And we have to understand the logic of this, how a tenant in that time when they were given a vineyard would sort of share in a portion of the crop in return for watching after the vineyard. It was common for owners to leave and to have someone that that would be essentially a renter from them.

And they would split the profits or share the profits. So the tenants would get some of the grapes, some of the wine. And then the owner would get some of the grapes, some of the wine. They would share the proceeds.

[11 : 42] There would be the one who has the capital investment, who's able to set up this vineyard. And then there's the one who doesn't have the resources, who's just there to watch over it. The tenants here are the Jewish religious leaders.

They are not the ones who set up the sacrificial system. They're not the ones who came up with the idea of the temple. No, God was the one who did all of that work. He was the one, chapter 12, verse one, who put a fence around the vineyard, dug a pit for a wine press, built a tower.

God here is the great investor. And so these priests and tribes are ones who are simply there to watch over what God has set up. And there's an expectation that they're going to have fruit, that they're going to accomplish God's mission for Israel, that Israel would be a light to the nations, a show people that the nations could look around and say, oh, that's what it actually looks like when God's people walk in God's ways.

That's what a society actually looks like when it's filled with justice and mercy and love and goodness. That's what it looks like when people treat each other as created in the image of God. And instead of doing that, the religious leaders chose instead to serve themselves. They chose instead to look for their own profit.

[13 : 04] They didn't care about the owner. They didn't care about God and his purposes and his ways and his mission. And so then we find out, okay, this owner sends his servants to check in.

Verse six on what's happening. Actually, verses two through six, he sends these servants in over and over to go check and see how is the vineyard doing? What's happening there? Am I getting the profit that I want?

Is the fruit that's supposed to come from these plants actually materializing? And instead of being treated with honor as the servants and representatives of the owner of the vineyard, of God himself, they're beaten and killed.

This is supposed to represent God sending his prophets throughout the Old Testament to his people, sending them to warn them about their lack of spiritual fruit, to rebuke the spiritual leaders for feeding themselves rather than feeding the people.

And so we can think of just a few examples out of many. Elisha, one of the Old Testament prophets, was persecuted by Jezebel, who was the queen of Israel. She wanted to kill him. If you want to read about that, you can read about it in 1 Kings chapter 19.

[14:13] Then we hear about Manasseh, the king of Judah. Tradition holds that Manasseh, this king of God's people, decided he was going to saw Isaiah in half.

Which is a great way to end as a prophet. And then in case we haven't forgotten, remember we see the last prophet before Jesus here in the Gospel of Mark.

Mark chapter 6, what happens to John the Baptist? He's beheaded. And so these religious leaders know all too well what Jesus is telling them.

Look, God has sent his representatives over and over again to warn you. And all you did was reject them. It was a bad deal to be an Old Testament prophet.

It was a thankless job. In fact, this is not in the Bible, but church tradition holds that at one point, the prophet Isaiah applied for term life insurance. And he was denied just based on his vocation.

[15:13] He was unable to qualify. He was laughed out of the building. That's how bad it was to be one of the servants. And so Jesus is taking this long route, this long story to get to the answer of their question.

Remember, they want to know by what authority. And after laying out the history of Israel, after reminding them of the way they've treated the prophets, he finally gets to the point.

I am the son of the vineyard owner. I am the one who's supposed to receive the inheritance.

I am the one to whom all of this belongs. By what authority do I cleanse the temple? I cleanse it as the son of the owner of the temple.

I cleanse it as one to whom it belongs. There is no higher authority. I do it in the authority by the authority of God himself, an authority that you don't care about.

[16:31] Jesus here could not be clearer. Again, verse 12, they perceived he told the parable against them. The meaning is not hidden.

Jesus has not been subtle here. He's told this obvious story and the religious leaders understand it all too well. He is telling them this, you rejected John the Baptist, you have rejected me, and you will kill me.

that's not all though. Verse 9, because of all that, judgment is coming.

What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. your time here has an expiration date.

Your authority over the temple is coming to an end. Your era of power and control will not last much longer. Now, this raises a question for us.

[17:47] Remember, I told you I'm going to tell you the story and then I'm going to tell you three things. You all, believe it or not, are not chief priests, scribes, or rulers of the temple. And this passage is meant to explain the overthrow of the temple leadership.

And so, what is it that we're supposed to draw out of this as people in 2022 reading this story about Jesus explaining his cleansing of the temple? Well, I'm going to give you three things for us to hold on to from this story as people who look forward to Jesus' second coming, people who follow after Jesus, things that give us hope and challenge from what Jesus tells us.

First of all, we find out in this story the end of the story. How is everything going to turn out? At the very end, we know the owner of the vineyard is coming back.

Verse nine, what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. Now, yes, when we're hearing about the owner of the vineyard, it's talking about the Jewish leadership.

And so, in a sense, what Jesus says here has already been done, and it foreshadows and follows after what we also know is going to happen at the end of the age. We may see injustice and oppression and selfishness happening now from the tenants of the vineyard, from those who are in charge in the religious world or the secular world who are looking to use rather than to love.

[19 : 19] and we know it will not last forever. The owner is coming back. He is going to clean house.

Now, there's a flip side to that that's also in this passage because when we talk about the fact that Jesus is coming back, there's this question that arises that was also true for the early church, which is this, why hasn't he come back yet?

If Jesus is coming back to make all things right, why is he waiting? It seems like things are getting pretty bad. It seems like now would be a great time.

If you remember when we went through 2 Peter, we looked in 2 Peter 3, and Peter actually addresses this question. He says, the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. What do we see here from the vineyard owner? He is incredibly patient. Verses 2 through 6 is him sending his servants over and over again and watching them get beaten or killed.

[20 : 33] It's almost nonsensical. You would think if you owned a vineyard and you sent one servant and that servant was beaten or killed, what would you do? You'd probably be posting on next door.

You guys would not believe I sent my servant in and he got beaten. Never hire these people as your tenants at your vineyard. Yet God just keeps sending them again and again. He's sending the prophets over and over showing his forbearance, his patience, his long-suffering with his people. Often you'll hear folks talk about how God in the Old Testament is a God of wrath. Then we have God of the New Testament, this God of love. Yet that's not the picture the Bible gives us. The picture the Bible gives us of this God who is just patient decade after decade, century after century, millennia after millennia.

God is more patient than you. God is more long suffering than you.

God has more forbearance than you do even if you are the nicest person I have ever met. And God does it for the sake of repentance.

[21 : 45] He gives his people time and time again opportunities to turn back and return to him. And so the vineyard owner is coming back.

God is coming back to this world to set all things right. And his delay shows his patience. It shows his love. It shows his wisdom.

And he is not patient forever. He's not patient forever.

So I told you I was going to tell you two things. The second is this. Well the first was we know the end of the story. God's patience does not mean he's not coming back. The second one is that ultimately his patience ends with him returning and there are two and only two options.

There are only two ways to live. Either we worship Jesus or we reject Jesus. Remember I've told you over and over as we've been going through the gospel of Mark that as the story moves forward as we get near the end we're no longer going to have three categories of people.

[22 : 52] At the beginning we had those who were on Jesus' team. They were pro-Jesus. We had those who were against Jesus. They hated him. And then we just had these crowds in the middle that didn't quite know what to do. They were intrigued.

They were curious. Now we're getting to the point where that middle category disappears. which is the narrator's way of telling us. Mark's way of underscoring that in the end as you get to know Jesus, as you understand him and study him, you have to make a choice.

There are only two options. Those who love Jesus and those who hate him. That's part of what Jesus is getting at here when he cites Psalm 118 in verse 10.

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. A cornerstone is the stone of a building that's laid first. It's the stone that has to be laid perfectly because everything else matches it and aligns with it.

Every other stone exists in reference to the cornerstone. Everything is submitted to it, aligned with it, in agreement with it. This quotation then from Psalm 118 is reminding us either we align with Jesus or we don't.

[24 : 02] Either we love the cornerstone or we reject it, either we build on it or we trip on it. Either you harden your heart or you repent. Either you decide you're going to try to be God or you submit to God.

Either your heart is hard or it is tender and responsive. Either you serve yourself or you serve the owner of the vineyard. Either God's word confirms judgment or it confirms salvation.

There are no other options. Either you reject God's messengers or you receive them. When it comes to Jesus, as we get closer and closer to the end of the story, you must make a choice. Are you going to build your life on the cornerstone or are you going to reject it and fight it? I warned you at the beginning as we began, Mark, it is not an intellectual exercise that we're taking part in, but instead the author here, Mark, is pointing the finger at us more and more.

He's asking the question of us over and over again. What are you going to do with this information? How are you going to respond to it? Remember Jesus' questions in chapter 10.

[25 : 16] He asked twice, what is it that you want from me? A question of the heart. Here the same question of the heart is coming up. How are you going to respond to me?

Are you going to receive my servants or are you going to beat them? Are you going to build your life on my cornerstone or are you going to reject it? Are you going to run towards me or run away from me?

There are no other options. So first, we know how the story ends.

We know the vineyard owner is coming back. Second, we know there's two and only two ways to live. Either we receive the king or reject the king. And the third and final thing is this.

When we come to a passage of scripture and it's showing us things that are incredibly negative, when it's rebuking people for sins that potentially we don't share in, it's likely that you're not a religious leader who is using the temple for your own purposes.

[26 : 18] What do we do with that? Well, as I've mentioned to you before, one of the ways we read the Bible, when we see a negative, we turn it positive. So you look at the Ten Commandments and you see, thou shalt not commit adultery.

And you think, I'm doing great. I haven't committed adultery. Well, no, there's a positive there for you. And the positive is build up your marriage. Make it as strong as you can. Do not murder. You think, well, I haven't murdered recently. I'm doing great. What can you do to promote and protect life? That's the positive. And so when we look at this negative, when we see the religious leaders beating God's servants, killing them, and throwing them away, what is our response? Our response is to look for the positive. The way that we act on God's word is we recognize his authority and his messengers. We receive God's word not with hardness or bitterness or indifference.

We receive it with joy and eagerness. We have this anticipation and this excitement about what God is going to tell us in his word, what we're going to learn, the ways that we're going to grow and be shaped as people who look more and more like him.

[27 : 23] As Israel failed in their mission to be a light to the nations, as they failed for people to be able to look at them and say, that's what it looks like when God's people walk in God's ways. We have a passion to say, what would it look like for this people to be God's people who walk in God's ways?

What would happen, the light we would be to our community if we were excited and zealous, filled with anticipation about what God's going to do in our midst?

Filled with the desires we talked about with the fig tree to grow in that fruit, to be filled with the fruit of the spirit. What would it be like for us not to try to kill the son of the vineyard owner, but instead to look forward to his appearing, to look forward to his coming and prepare for it?

Many of you, if you have someone who's coming over to your house, they're not a regular guest, you probably feel some obligation to try to clean up and tidy up, right? You want it to be the most hospitable environment it can be.

You want to give them a good and warm welcome. Sometimes you can recognize this when you go over to someone's house because you look at the carpet and what do you see? The fresh vacuum stripes.

[28 : 38] And so you know, okay, this person has done the prep. They've gotten ready. They cared about this event. They want to honor the guest who's coming over.

And so what I'm saying is this. As we look forward to Jesus and his return, our hearts and our lives have the stripes of the vacuum cleaner on them.

Not out of guilt or shame or fear, but because we're so excited and joyful about the coming of the king. We want him to find everything set in order.

We want him to be honored and exalted and glorified. We're doing the opposite of these tenets. We're preparing for his return.

Of course, this parable is also a type of prediction. Jesus tells about the past, but he also tells about the future. In verses 2 through 5, we hear about the prophets who have been beaten and killed.

[29 : 44] And when Jesus says this, all the prophets have been either beaten or killed. Jesus then tells them about something that hasn't happened. Verses 7 through 8.

But those tenants said to one another, this is the heir. Come, let us kill him and the inheritance will be ours. And they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard.

Jesus is telling them, not only did you kill the prophets in the past, you will kill me, the son, in the future. That's how twisted and broken and curved inward your hearts are.

And of course, that is the sacrifice that makes it possible for us to look forward with joy to Jesus' return. To be the ones who long to have the marks of the vacuum cleaner on our carpet.

That we know that what Jesus has done for us when he came to this earth, he lived the perfect life that we could not live and he died the death that we should have died. And so none of what Jesus is saying matters unless we know how this particular story in the gospels end.

[30 : 52] And it ends with Jesus going to his death and then rising again from the dead. He comes to die for hard-hearted people who beat and kill the prophets.

But who turn and follow him in repentance. He comes for hard-hearted people and changes their hearts to hearts of flesh.

He comes for people like you and me. The house that I grew up on in, the front door had window panes, not in the door, but on both sides of the door.

In fact, those windows are still there. They're called apparently double side lights. I just thought of them as windows along the side of the door. And every Christmas, every December really is before Christmas.

And then at one point we shifted it to New Year's. All of my dad's family would come to our house from different parts of the country. And so we would spend several days, maybe a week, getting ready because there's lots of things that need to be cleaned and cooked and prepared.

[32 : 00] And then the day would come when we knew our family was actually going to arrive. And so what would we do? Well, I for one would look out those side lights because I was so excited.

And even though I knew they weren't going to get there until 2 p.m., I would check it earlier than that. Because who knows, right? We didn't have, people didn't have cell phones back then. This was in a different age.

So no one was texting you or sending you their PIN, you know. You might get a call from a rest station like, oh, we're two hours away. So you never know the exact moment that they might arrive. But you knew that they were and that when that time happened, you know, your cousins would be there.

Both the awkward cousin and the fun cousin. And things would be more exciting than they had been at that moment before. And so it was worth it to look out, to try to deal with the impatience, to look and see when it was you would see the car coming down the street.

Brothers and sisters, our Lord Jesus is coming back to make all things right. And so we prepare our hearts and our homes and our churches and our lives for him.

[33 : 10] Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you again for your word. We ask that you would not let it return to you void, but instead it would accomplish all the purposes you have for it.

That it would be at work, growing our longing and desire for you to come back and that we would live in light of your return. We ask all of these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. I invite you to stand for our closing hymn.