

“His Fruit”

It's crunch time, and things are coming to a head. Jesus has already entered Jerusalem to the shouts of “hosanna” – cleansed the Temple – had His authority challenged – and His passion looms on the horizon. His death draws near, but so does His resurrection and ascension into heaven – all within the next 40 days or so. So, what does Jesus do? He continues to minister – to teach – preaching to all with ears to hear.

2020 feels a little like crunch time, doesn't it? The same Jesus who suffered, died, was raised to life, and even now rules and reigns at the right hand of God the Father almighty – speaks to you today – teaching you. And what is His lesson?

It is the same lesson He has been teaching God's beloved children throughout all generations. As in Isaiah's day – the Lord has planted His vineyard. In other words, the Lord will have His Israel – His Church – His beloved children who belong to Him, and who are the heirs of His kingdom.

Jesus, in the parable, says – “When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get HIS fruit.” Notice that it is HIS fruit – its what belongs to HIM – and, it is the fruit that HE produces.

And what is that fruit? Well, In Isaiah He says that He comes looking for justice and righteousness. To use the language from our Epistle Lesson (Philippians 3), it is the fruit of “knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” – the fruit of counting all things “as rubbish, in order that I might gain Christ and be found in Him” – the fruit of having “the righteousness from God that depends on faith” – the very righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself.

And it all culminates in this – “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and may share His sufferings, becoming like Him in Him death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

The Lord comes to His vineyard, looking for HIS fruit – and what does He find, but “wild grapes”? Rebellious – do your own thing fruit. The tenants beat and kill and stone His servants – and then they kill His Son, the Heir. “Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance,” they say. The wicked tenants attempt to steal the vineyard – to have their own Church, their own kingdom – to do salvation their own way.

The chief priests and the Pharisees know that Jesus is speaking about them – that they are the wicked tenants with rebellious, wild-grapes-fruit. Even now, they are seeking to arrest Him and put Him to death. Even now they seek to rob the Kingdom of God from its rightful owner.

Try to picture that scene in your mind. Jesus is in the Temple courtyards teaching the crowds – and the chief priests and Pharisees are standing right there. Already they’ve dodged Jesus’ question about where John’s baptism is from. Already they are afraid of the crowds that are gathered around – those who have not rejected Jesus’ authority, like they have.

They’ve listened to the parable, and then Jesus says – “When the owner of comes, what will he do to those tenants?” And the crowd answers – “He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”

These religious leaders know what was said through the Prophet Isaiah – how the Lord promises to remove the hedge from His vineyard, break down its walls, make it a waste. The Lord has prophesied that the house of Israel will be devoured, trampled down, overtaken by briars and thorns, with no rain – becoming a wasteland.

But, the owner of the vineyard will “let out [His] vineyard to other tenants who will give Him the fruits in their seasons.” In spite of the rebellion of His chosen people – the Lord will have His Israel, His Church – and Jesus Christ is always the Cornerstone.

The lesson for us is not whether Christ's Church can survive such times – if Christianity will cease to be. Christ's Church will remain. He's promised that not even the gates of Hades shall prevail against it. The question is, will you be built upon Christ the Cornerstone – or will you construct your own church?

To reject Christ alone as your Savior is to reject the Lord's Cornerstone – to stumble and fall – to be broken to pieces and crushed. The Lord Jesus speaks this warning into your ears this day – so that you will not be laid waste, eternally.

It is not a perfect Church, a people without sin that the Lord seeks – rather – He seeks those who bear HIS fruit. He knows our rebellious nature – how we cringe at the thought of submitting to any authority (all of which belongs to Him). He's seen our "wild grapes" – the produce our sinful nature brings forth each day, as we seek to rule and reign over our own kingdom – as our flesh lusts, covets, and gorges itself on what it desires.

And so, He tears down what we have constructed for ourselves. He lays waste our sinful flesh that fills our lives with briars and thorns. He lays bare our sin so that HIS fruit might be produced in us – a mouth that confesses, "I, a poor, miserable sinner ..."

The Lord does not leave us to wallow in our sin, and suffering, and death – but rather, showers the sinner with His mercy. He gives His Son to you so that you may have a Rock to stand upon – a Cornerstone upon which your whole life is built – a life in which HE brings forth HIS fruit, "for you."

The same Jesus who once stood in the Temple, now stands in the midst of you today. He gives you His very own Body and Blood – which produces HIS fruit in you – the forgiveness of all your sin, His very own righteous standing with the Father, and the power of His resurrection.

He who died for your sin, has been raised to life, never to die again – and this is the life He gives you today. All else is rubbish – compared to the treasure of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord, as your Cornerstone, as your life and salvation.

Jesus teaches His parable to you today, so that His kingdom may be yours, by faith. By His death and resurrection, He has assured for you, your resurrection from the dead – now, and at the last – to live with Him in His vineyard, eternally. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.