

Text: Matthew 21:33-43 (Pentecost 20, Series A, October 18, 2020)

Theme: Conclusion Uncompromised!

Virtue (basic truth): Jesus' parable highlights God's patient care to bring about fruits of faith.

Malady (our problem): Sinners always struggle to present fruits of faith to our eternal Lord.

Telic Note (goal): By means of this sermon, the Spirit of grace uses Jesus' parable of the patient landowner to inspire our lives to bring fruits of faith to his eternal glory.

Propositional Statement (aim): In life, we're familiar with the logical conclusion. Sports. Books. Shows. No surprise when they end exactly how we think they should. With a parable, Jesus applies that concept to the hearts of the religious leaders. And they were right in it – even as Jesus thrills to include himself as the *conclusion uncompromised*.

Specific Law in Text: *“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end”* (Matthew 21:41).

Specific Gospel in Text: *“The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes”* (Matthew 21:42).

Doctrinal Thought: In God's amazing plan, our redemption meant Jesus' rejection.

Sanctification Thought: *“Heavenly Father, how patient your heart, how powerful your work! Thanks, dear LORD, for the gift of your Son and for your Spirit's work to bring me to faith in you. Continue to refresh my heart in the conclusion-uncompromised by which my forgiveness, peace, and eternity are sure. Bless me, Lord of All, to bring forth fruits of faith your glory and praise. In Jesus' name I am blessed and bold to ask it. Amen!”*

Matthew 21:33-43

³³“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. ³⁴When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

³⁵“The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

³⁸“But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.’ ³⁹So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰“Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

⁴¹“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”

⁴²Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: *“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes”?*

⁴³“Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

“The LORD’s right hand has done mighty things! The LORD’s right hand is lifted high; the LORD’s right hand has done mighty things” (Ps. 118:15, 16). Matthew’s gospel thrills to show us how that’s true in Jesus, and how God’s grace and peace are yours in him. Alleluia and Amen!

You’ve heard it, read it, watched it, or experienced it. And, in doing so, the reality is familiar.

It’s the show you turned off early because you know how it ends. Plus, it’s late. It’s the game you left early because you know who’d lose. Plus, you wanted to beat traffic. It’s the narrative you never finished because the conclusion was unquestioned. Plus, exam was the next day and you had other homework to do, too. It’s the job-site you left early because everything was all-but-wrapped up and nothing could possibly go wrong. Plus, it was 5:00. Somewhere.

Regardless of the *what*, though, the *why* of your rationale and role was the same: taught by perception or educated by experience, you clearly saw how the remainder would pan play out, and you based your subsequent activity on a ***conclusion uncompromised***. The show, the sport, the tale, the task – been there, done that, seen that, read that, experienced it. Ending...obvious.

Likely, it was the Tuesday before Jesus pushed his tombstone aside; and the revered Rabbi went to the temple area to teach and interact with the religious types of the day – chief priests, local professors, church elders. They already didn’t like him and are conjuring ways to kill him – primarily because the authority he claimed and praise he received. Jesus’ ride into Jerusalem a few days prior solidified it. And, of course, the Lord who knows all hearts knew that; he knows how it’ll end. But, to clarify who he is, the authority he has, what he came to be and do, the Teacher teaches three parables – each an earthly story with a heavenly meaning; each used to bring out a ***conclusion uncompromised*** that Jesus is who he says he is. Each, in its own way, to illumine his heart of patience and work of power. Heaven help us appreciate and apply it.

Recall the chronicle. Landowner plants a vineyard, and spares no expense – a hedge, a tower, a winepress (Matthew 21:33). All his doing, his activity; all done exceptionally well with the best possible chance for fruit. Rents it out, then heads out. Pay attention to that – he rents it out, not relinquishes it over. Still very much his. And, because it is, he’s entitled to *season-fruit*. But, when he sends servants for it, with increasing brutality, the tenants seize the servants, beat one, kill one, stone one. Patiently, more servants are sent, but ***conclusion uncompromised***, tenants do the very same thing. Finally, in an act of dignity – not desperation! – one final attempt to remind them who they were and who they weren’t, the landowner sends his son. Perhaps they’d respect the son. That’s logical, right?! Display some remorse for their wickedness. See the son, respect the father; receive the son, receive his sender. No. Sin conspiracy leads to commitment:

“But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him” (Matthew 21:38, 39).

Foolish as the idea is – who assumes murder makes you an heir? – faulty logic isn’t Jesus point. Instead, with the parable laid out perfectly, with a ***conclusion uncompromised*** even by imperfect standards of justice, Jesus asks: *“when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants”* (Mt. 21:40)? Wretched end for wretches. Game over. Show over. Story over.

And, of course, we’d answer the exact same thing; because that’s the righteous ending and ***conclusion uncompromised*** everyone sees coming. Obviously! May as well close the account, Jesus! But do realize: if Jesus would do so, it’d leave us terrified. Let me say that again: as easy and natural as it’d be for Jesus to let *that* conclusion be *the* conclusion, but he’s got more to say. Thankfully. Because if he doesn’t, this is terrifying. Here’s why:

As he’s teaching, it’s clear Jesus uses this parable to talk about the relationship between God and Old Testament Israel – especially the religious leaders of the day. In fact, in Isaiah chapter 5, the imagery about a faithful LORD and a fruitless vineyard was an amazing and well-known warning to them. Jesus’ chosen illustration is intentional. But, as much as Jesus’ parable applies to church-leaders, church-goers then, it applies much to church-leaders, church-goers now, too.

No, we haven’t beaten, killed, stoned God’s servants. But we have neglected the Word they carry and Voice they repeat, haven’t we? And if God really is serious about his Name, his Word, his Day, our ***conclusion uncompromised*** is serious, too. No, we haven’t killed the heir to claim inheritance. But we have, denied, disowned, and disobeyed the Son, haven’t we? And, if God says that demands punishment, too, the ***conclusion uncompromised*** is clear. No, we haven’t been tasked with keeping the vineyard of physical fruits. But God does ask for fruits of faithfulness to him and fruits of faith to his glory. And, since our sin-stained lives are without excuse, the ***conclusion uncompromised***, we’re no different than those church-leaders, church-goers to whom Jesus spoke outside the temple. They’re right: *Wretches to a wretched end.*

But, what if the ***conclusion uncompromised*** everyone anticipates isn’t the ***conclusion uncompromised*** by God himself orchestrates? Think of it this way: ever left a game early because you knew who’d lose – only to find out who won? Ever turned off a show or put down a narrative early because you knew the end – only to find out its conclusion was totally different? Ever clocked out for 5:00 somewhere, only to find out the job wasn’t as finished as you thought it was? Of course! So, sometimes, our perception isn’t as clear.

Alluded to it before: it’s an act of grace that Jesus doesn’t let their conclusion be the ***conclusion uncompromised*** according to God’s plan. Notice: he doesn’t disagree or pretend it’s not that

bad; he ultimately agrees with them! And that's our warning, too! But, in amazing love and in love undeserved, the revered Rabbi and tremendous Teacher boldly injects himself into the story, too. It's as if, in the conclusion that everyone sees coming, Jesus adds God's conclusion. They finish the story with the logical conclusion; but Jesus brings it to a better one. Even before he died on a Friday, he thrills to bring sinners to the ***conclusion uncompromised*** that centers on him. In power and patience, in love and longing, with open heart and open arms, Jesus identifies himself as the son rejected and killed, as the capstone rejected, the ***conclusion uncompromised*** that brought about our redemption. Did you hear it?! Did you see it?! They know what rejection and sin deserves; but Jesus brings them – and us! – to the marvelous heart and work of our God:

“Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘the stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes’ (Mt. 21:43; Ps. 118:22, 23)?

Friends . . . that's Jesus! And, in him the ***conclusion*** is always ***uncompromised***! Don't close the Book, because you think he's not in control. Don't tune him out, because he doesn't appear to be winning. Don't clock out, because you think he isn't capable of the work we need him to do! Instead, marvel and then marvel again, that, in terms of salvation and eternity, in terms of forgiveness and peace, in terms of life and eternal life, in terms of your hope and confidence, Jesus is the ***conclusion uncompromised***. He won! Lives! Forgives! Helps! Guides! Sustains!

Put that into the context of our Foundation consideration: We haven't heard his Word or used his name in faithful and godly ways. He's forgiven those sins. We haven't respected him or his servants the way he deserves or demands; we know it. But he's taken those sins away, too. We haven't brought fruits of faith or been faithful like we'd promised. Still, he credits us with his righteousness, his innocence, his blessedness. That's the joy of the gospel, the blessing of the ***conclusion uncompromised*** because Christ had died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again.

And, before this sermon ends, there's one more hint of grace Jesus puts into our lesson. *“the kingdom of God will be . . . given to a people who will produce its fruit” (Matthew 21:43).*

Not in a cocky way. Not in a self-righteous or arrogant way. Not in a way that gives us credit or glory . . . that's us. By the Spirit's grace on our hearts, we're the ones who know how it ends because of Jesus; we're the ones who get to live like it – to God's glory – as we continue to bring fruits to him. The kingdom is still very much his; but blessings and benefits of it are still very much ours. We get to live in it, friends; let's do it! We get to enjoy the blessings and benefits of it, friends; let's do it! Heaven help each of us enjoy and employ those opportunities in ways that make him smile – here and in the ***conclusion uncompromised*** to which he'll bring us. Promise.

Alleluia and Amen!