

April 3, 2022 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

### Do Not Throw Jesus Away!

If looks could kill... Jesus would have died on Tuesday instead of Friday. The Jewish religious leaders – Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, Elders – hated Jesus. They constantly harassed him. Certainly, they were jealous of his popularity, but they especially hated his message that they needed him – a lowly carpenter’s kid from Nazareth – in order to get into heaven. They felt insulted. When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, just as the Old Testament said the Messiah would, the Jewish leaders felt as if Jesus was thumbing his nose at them. Their hatred was at the boiling point. On Monday, Jesus sent animals scurrying and coins flying as he cleared the temple courtyard of greedy salesmen who gave a cut of their money to the Jewish leaders. Now Jesus hit their wallets. They were furious! On Tuesday, the Jewish leaders assailed Jesus with all sorts of trick questions and he answered all of them perfectly, further frustrating them. Then Jesus asked them a question that they could not answer and they looked foolish in front of the crowds. They wanted to do more than just walk up to Jesus and slap him. They wanted to choke him to death. But they could not because of the crowds around Jesus. If looks could kill...

That brings us to Luke 20:9 where Jesus told a parable about the Jewish leaders. Once upon a time, a man planted a vineyard. Before he left to take care of other things, he leased it to some farmers. They agreed to work in the vineyard and return a portion of the crop to him. At harvest time the owner sent someone to collect his share of the harvest. The farmers, or tenants, however, did not want to give the owner what he deserved. So, they beat up the servant – ripping the flesh off of him – and sent him away empty handed. The owner could have had them arrested right away for breach of contract and disorderly conduct. Instead, he sent another servant to collect the crop whom they treated the same. Then a third. Finally, he decided to send his son, reasoning that they would certainly respect his son. When the farmers recognized the son, however, they figured that if they killed him, the heir, they would be able to take over the vineyard. They committed cold-blooded, pre-meditated murder. When Jesus said this, the people shrieked (:16), “**God forbid!**”

In the Old Testament (Isaiah 5), the Jewish nation is described as a vineyard. God is the owner of the vineyard and the Jews are the workers in the vineyard. God was looking for the harvest of faith. He wanted them to trust in

him for salvation. He sent different prophets to them, men like Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Instead of trusting in the Lord, however, the Jews rejected those prophets. Elijah was forced into hiding. Isaiah was laughed at. Jeremiah was thrown into prison. Finally, Jesus, the perfect Son of God, came to the Jewish nation and they rejected him, too. The temple was still being rebuilt during Jesus’ ministry and it’s not too far fetched to think that Jesus picked up a building stone (We would call it a brick.) while he was explaining this point. Jesus said that he was the chosen rock, the promised Messiah, talked about in Psalm 118. That Psalm predicted that the promised Messiah would be rejected like builders throwing away the most important stone of the project. Jesus looked directly at the Jewish leaders and said (:17,18), “**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; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.**” I like to think that Jesus threw the brick to the ground as he said that to emphasize his point. It does not matter if a clay pot is dropped on a brick or if the brick is dropped on the clay pot. Either way, the clay pot is destroyed. Jesus was telling the Jewish leaders directly to their faces that because they rejected him, he was going to destroy them. That was like dropping a bomb on them. If looks could kill...

The Jewish leaders considered themselves to be model citizens in God’s kingdom. They regularly went to the temple, or church. They supported the church with large and generous gifts. They gave even more than the required 10% or their crops and flocks. They said their prayers. They were active members of the church. They lived moral lives following the commandments. They even went to the special services at church. Did you notice something? Those Jewish leaders look just like you and me. We go to church. We support the church with our offerings. We have been going to church for years. We live pretty moral lives. We say our prayers. We even make it to the special services during Lent and Holy Week.

If Jesus was only concerned about the Jewish leaders standing in front of him, he could have just spoken to them and let it go at that. But the Holy Spirit preserved this parable three times because it’s such an important point that we need to apply to ourselves. We need this warning that Jesus gives here. **Do not throw Jesus away!** Jesus wants us to pause and ponder and examine our hearts: “Am I guilty of rejecting Jesus like those Jewish leaders?” Outwardly, we might look like model Christians most of the time, or at least we try to give that impression to each other, don't we? An honest assessment of our hearts, though, reminds us of a sad, secret, scary truth. We are not as good as people may think we are. We have all done and said things that were

wrong. No excuse. And our minds race away into bad thoughts before we even know what's happening. If someone could read our minds, they would know that we sometimes harbor hatred, anger, jealousy and selfishness in our hearts. Sometimes we look down at others and judge them as if we are morally superior to them, as if our sins were not as sinful as theirs. It's so easy to remember the sins others have committed and how they fall short of God's perfect standard, but forget what we have done wrong. It's so easy to ignore the needs of others and not even take the time to pray for those who need help. Offerings given out of habit instead of coming from our hearts are not pleasing to the Lord. Being able to recite the Lord's Prayer doesn't mean a thing to God unless you are praying the thoughts. It's so easy to become religious zombies – people who are going through the motions but are really spiritually dead. Having a warm body with a cold heart in the pews is not the fruit of faith God is looking for. When we look closely, we realize that we are not any better than those Jewish leaders who rejected Jesus. We can not blame the Jews for causing Christ's crucifixion because we are guilty too. Like them, we deserve to be crushed by Jesus eternally in hell.

In April of 1989, a fellow in Pennsylvania was walking through a flea market. He saw a painting that did not really appeal to him, but he liked the gold colored and ornately carved frame. He thought he could use the frame, so he bought the painting for \$4. When he got home, he took painting out of the frame and discovered “an unspeakably fresh copy” of the Declaration of Independence. Back in 1776, 200 copies of the Declaration of Independence were made. Only 26 remain. That newly discovered copy of the Declaration was sold for \$2.4 million. And that was 30 years ago. The Declaration of Independence is the ideological cornerstone of our country. But someone got rid of it for 4 measly dollars.

Jesus is the cornerstone of our salvation. Without him, there is no forgiveness, no heaven. Like a cheap painting at a flea market, Jesus did not look like much – a carpenter's kid from lowly Nazareth. Rejected by his own hometown. No property. No house. No money. There was nothing beautiful about Jesus as they used a whip to rip the skin off of his back. As the weight of his body pulled down upon the spikes driven through his flesh, he looked more like a worm than a man. And yet, hidden behind that humble appearance, was a Savior more valuable to us than anything or anyone else in the world! Through his death, Jesus took away all our guilt. No more nagging conscience. Complete forgiveness. God's righteous wrath is replaced with a wide smile. Through his resurrection, you have eternal life with a glorified body – no more stress, worry, aches, pains, tears – perfect unending happiness. Jesus is your priceless treasure. Throw Jesus away? Never!

If Jesus did not care about us and the Jewish leaders, he would never have given this warning. If he did not care, he would have just laughed at the Jewish leaders and destroyed them in hell. This parable of warning is a sign of his love. Notice the winsome love in this parable.

- God planted a vineyard. He didn't have to. When Adam & Eve sinned, he could have sent them and every human to hell. But he did not. He planted a vineyard. He gave the good news of salvation.
- He sent servants to harvest the crop. His faithful prophets kept working the soil in people's hearts and planting the message of salvation.
- He demonstrated extreme patience. As prophet after prophet was rejected by people, he kept sending more and more prophets.
- He sent his Son. He told Jesus to set aside his power and glory and live a humble life that ended in death, even death on a cross. God sent his one and only, his beloved Son, even though he knew what was going to happen to him. What love!
- Jesus came into the world knowing full well that he was going to be despised and rejected. He knew he was going to suffer. He knew he was going to be crucified. But he came anyway. What love!
- Jesus gladly exchanged his perfect life for your sins and mine. He was glad to get blamed for what he did not do, so that we could get credit for what he did right.
- Jesus did not pull back, but offered his hands and feet to the nails.
- Jesus freely offered his life in exchange for your life. What love!

The Jews continued to reject Jesus and his loving warning. What a sad tragedy! They laughed with delight when – three days later – they saw to it that he was crucified. They mocked his naked body racked with pain and gasping for breath. They celebrated when he died. They thought that they had finally crushed him and silenced him forever. Yes, indeed, Jesus was crushed for our iniquities. But three days after that, Jesus crushed them. He destroyed the power of death and the devil once and for all. Jesus lives and his address is your heart. Jesus gave you the fruit of faith that God wants to see in your hearts. You are a Christian, God's chosen child. You belong to Jesus and he belong to you. You will – literally – live happily ever after with him. Throw Jesus away. God forbid! He's your Savior. Amen.