Luke 20:17-18 But he looked at them and said, “Then what about this that is written: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone? 18“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush the one on whom it falls.”

Parables are such interesting things. They are earthly stories with heavenly meanings. Jesus taught them for a purpose. That purpose was given to us in Luke 7 where Jesus says: **“To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God, but to the rest I speak in parables so that ‘even though they see, they may not see, and even though they hear, they may not understand.”** That’s right, Jesus deliberately taught parables knowing that people wouldn’t be able to grasp what He was talking about. Yes, Jesus was carrying out an act of judgment, wasn’t he?

Now if you are a reader of parables in the Bible you should be aware of the fact that it is considered that most parables are written to convey one specific message. In other words, it is best to figure out what the specific message is rather than decide to take numerous lessons from a parable. Take for instance the parable we heard last week, the parable of the Prodigal Son. The whole point of that parable was the Father’s love. The father loved his son enough to give him his inheritance probably knowing he would destroy himself. The prodigal son knew his father’s love and that he could go back because of that love. The father loved his son enough to accept him back just because he returned. The father loved his oldest son and worked to help him with his issue. From beginning to end the parable is about the father’s love and the wonder it is.

I say that because there are those who want to find a lesson in all sorts of places in that parable but at best you could say “maybe” to any other lesson. Does the parable say it is okay to go off and be a wild child for a while? Does the parable say anything about how God might push us to the bottom to wake us up? Are you sure the prodigal son actually had a change of heart? Does this parable say anything about being taken for granted or about the rewards of faithfulness? At best all you can say is “maybe” because that is not the point of the parable.

Today we have another parable. It is a wonderful story. But you need to make sure that you pay attention to the point of the parable. You also need to contemplate those incredible words at the end of this parable and what they mean. Those words found at the end of verse 19 that say, **“the chief priests and the experts in the law began looking for a way to lay hands on him, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them.’** Contemplate this, because as far as I know this is the only parable that Jesus gave where he deliberately made is so they could grasp the lesson! Just so you know, this parable by all accounts was spoken on the Tuesday of Holy Week, just three days before they arrest and murder Jesus! Our theme will be: **DO NOT REJECT THE LORD GOD!**

So if you would, just a brief overview of this parable. The man who owns the vineyard is none other than God himself and the vineyard is nothing other than this world of ours. God is the owner of everything and you and I are just the renters who are to give our due to the Lord. But because of sin, the world has a tendency to ignore and despise God. The various servants that are sent simply represent the prophets that God has indeed sent over time. Prophets who were indeed spurned, abused, misused and killed by those they were sent to. With that, the owner, the Lord God determines to send his Son to the tenants. It is then that the true wickedness of the tenants comes out.

Here is what the tenants thought: **“But when the tenant farmers saw him, they talked it over with one another. They said, ‘This is the heir. Let’s kill him, so that the inheritance will be ours.’ 15They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”** Contemplate all that is revealed there. The tenants knew it was the son. The tenants determine to stand opposed to the owner, to usurp His authority and rights, but even more, they don’t decide to just abuse and rough up the son, they determine to kill the son! I have said for years and I will keep saying it to all who will listen: “Stop deciding that you can take on God and win! Stop thinking that you are bigger, bolder and wiser than the Lord God! It is going to get you nothing but trouble!” Yet please note that those who despise and reject God don’t seem to be able to think and reason properly. Maybe they decided that since God didn’t step in when they abused the servants that God was powerless and too weak to stand against them. It was foolish, absolutely foolish to decide to oppose the owner because such men have their armies. God has all power, dominion and authority in everything. You and I cannot stand opposed to God!

By the way, it is the people who after hearing this parable respond with a **“May this never be!”** The people understood the horror and the absolute justice of the owner’s actions. They pleaded against this because even though it is the tenants who are going to be rounded up and destroyed the common people understood that everyone would be affected by what will happen. That is why Jesus speaks the words he does, words that actually come from Psalm 118. It is at this point that we need to listen to and contemplate what those words mean.

Those words are: **“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone? 18“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush the one on whom it falls.”** First grasp the importance of the first line about the stone rejected. The builders erroneously reject the stone. They decide that the stone is not right, not good, not what they are looking for. Yet, that stone becomes the cornerstone. The cornerstone of a building in the old days made or broke the quality of construction. As one commentator put it beautifully concerning this stone: *“This was the first stone that was laid in a new building. The other stones were lined up according to it. If the cornerstone was faulty, the whole building would be that way. If it was sound, the structure would be solid.”*

Mankind foolishly thinks they understand it all and have a handle on everything going on, but they do not. That is clear just in the fact that they reject Jesus, reject God’s Word and what it is, thus rejecting the whole truth of God. Yet, God makes it clear that Jesus is his cornerstone, that everything of and concerning the wonder of God is revealed in, through, and by Jesus. The question that is now important is this, “How do we know if we have rejected the cornerstone?”

That is the point of the next words. Those words are the words of Jesus. When you and I fall on the stone, when you and I are on the stone, the strength, size, marvel and power of the stone is upon us, in the sense that we have grasped what this stone is. I have always understood this verse to be saying that when we humble ourselves, when we recognize our unworthiness before the Lord God that is best. It is another way of saying we need to grasp our sinfulness and how we have fallen far short of the glory of God. I believe the Book of James captures the whole point of this when he writes in 4:8-10 **“Come near to God, and he will come near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded people. Lament, mourn, and weep. Let your laughter be changed into mourning and your joy into gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift you up.”** As humans, yield to the Lord God. The way we cleanse our hands is in Jesus. The way we overcome our sinful nature and the battle we have because of the new man is in Jesus. Don’t make this world and what it is about anything! Make the Lord your heart and core and you will find yourself in the end, forgiven, exalted, glorified and an heir of the kingdom of God forever. All because we grasp and understand the importance and message of Jesus!! Think of it as being on the Stone, the stone has become your foundation.

The message is different for those who oppose Jesus. The picture given is of that stone falling on you. Not a small stone at all. I am lead to think about the stones I saw in Israel that composed the original wall of Solomon’s Temple. I am pretty sure I remember stones at least 10 foot long with at least 4 foot sides and that these stones were reported to have weighed in excess of 10 tons. Jesus is bigger than those and yet I can tell you if any one of those stones were dropped on you, you are not going to survive. You will be crushed and absolutely pulverized. The stone will suffer no damage. Understand, the tenants who opposed the king: In the end they were destroyed.

Here is something important to grasp. You can believe what I just told you or not. You can dismiss it as backward, unscientific, religiously blind thinking if you want. But when, as I believe will happen, you finally come face to face with the Lord God and you find out that all that is revealed in the Holy Scriptures is true and trustworthy, then just what do you think is going to happen? Me, I think God will have the last word.

To let the sadness of this whole event and conversation sink in I want to then turn our attention to what was said at the very end. **“The chief priests and the experts in the law began looking for a way to lay hands on him, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them.’** Those words are, at least to me, some of the most frightening words found in Scripture. Here is why I say that.

Jesus ended the parable by making it clear that the owner would destroy the evil tenants. The chief priests and experts in the law knew and understood the teachings of God’s Word that for those who do not believe, for those who reject the Lord God there was an eternal existence coming that is described as “eternal destroying.” They were reminded in this parable of these truths of God’s Word. They knew that this parable was against them and the only response they can come up with is: **“a way to lay hands on him.”** These religious men were directly confronted by the fact of their eternal destruction and despite that, they, let this sink in, just like the tenants in the parable, plot and conspire all the more against the son, yes against Jesus the Son of God.

Now you might argue that they didn’t know Jesus was God’s Son. Why not? Jesus fulfilled all that God’s Word said the Messiah would be. Jesus did so many miracles, above and beyond any of the really spectacular prophets, that there could only be one conclusion. Jesus fulfilled, by our count, and surely they must have thought of this, some 350 of the prophecies about the coming Savior. 350! If Jesus had only fulfilled 50 that would have gotten my attention, but 350 is way beyond coincidence or way beyond simple circumstance and even way beyond the ability of one man and a group of 12 guys to plot and plan to fulfill. If you suspect that Jesus has just fulfilled 50, wouldn’t you take care and be real sure of yourself just on the basis that he might be God’s Son? But not these guys! These guys are so blinded by their false faith, by their false pietism and by their own false sense of human security that they actually and directly work at making the parable of Jesus a true story! How blind, how lost, how godless do you need to be in order to let that happen?

Here is the scary part. If this was true of these men, then could it also be true of us? Could we be so wrapped up in the way we see it, the way we want it to be that we don’t really see it? I am telling you this could be true because Jesus speaks this way in Matthew 7:21-23. **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and drive out demons in your name and perform many miracles in your name?’ Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers.”**

The only thing that is going to make the difference is what God’s Word says. God’s Word is clear and precise. God’s Word is everything that God wants us to know and believe. God’s Word will be the measure. So don’t you think it important that you make sure that what you believe is truly and really in God’s Word? Don’t you think the hope that you have for eternal life is clearly based on what God has said and not on what you want to believe and hold on to? Take a good look at these men and how they act and then understand that we are no better and in just as much danger as they are if we do not submit and yield all truth and wisdom to God and Jesus. That’s what’s going on here. Jesus’ final warning to them to turn away from their false faith and turn to the truth of God. He is that truth of God.

So, dear people, humble yourselves before the Lord. Wrestle with the truth of what God’s Word says. Make sure that your faith measures up to the faith that God has given. I believe that is possible. I believe that is why we have the Bible and the Holy Spirit. I believe God can deliver us even from ourselves, as we hear his Word, as His Holy Spirit grants us life and faith, as we just lay our lives, our very souls into his hands. In other words, we believe God above and beyond anything in this world. Then the wonder and joy of Jesus and His victory will be ours. Amen.