

One Man's Garbage is Another Man's Treasure!

"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. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

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

"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.

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

"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."

Jesus said to them, "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"?

"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.

On November 7, 2009, a navy warship, the U.S.S. New York, was commissioned into service. But this is no ordinary ship. A part of it was built with recycled steel, steel salvaged from the rubble left by the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City.

Over 350,000 tons of steel (that's over 700,000,000 pounds) was salvaged. Some of it was recycled and used to build the bow of the U.S.S. New York. Other recycled steel was used to build firehouses in Michigan and Minnesota and to build town halls in New Jersey and Alaska, and countless memorials across the nation.

Recycling is good. It takes what would otherwise be garbage and make it into something useful. In fact, you heard the phrase, "One man's garbage is another man's treasure." Friends, that is exactly what we have in this parable today. Jesus is considered garbage by so many, yet leave it up to the Lord to take one man's garbage and make it our treasure.

I. What the parable means.

Often Jesus spoke in parables. Many of these parables are warm and fuzzy. Think of the parable of the lost sheep. Who wouldn't find it a pleasing to see Jesus carrying that sheep on his shoulders and angels cheering in heaven? But not this parable. It is rather dark: ***"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.'"*** This is a sad parable because it is about murder and it is based on a true story.

The parable is easy to understand. The vineyard is God's church, in particular his Old Testament church up to Christ. The farmers are those who were in charge of his church, the kings, leaders and the priests. The fruit or grapes are the members of this church. The servants are the various prophets God sent to his people.

We learn that this church was built and is owned by God. He planted the vineyard. He built the wall around it, built the winepress and the tower. All the farmers had to do was bring the fruit to God. But as the parable explained, this was sadly not the case. Instead of leading the people to God, they tried to lead them away from God. Even the priests in God's church built altars to false gods like the Baals. And the promise of the Messiah was perverted into some sort of earthly ruler. The fruit was not given to God. This parable is a history of the Old Testament.

This parable is also an autobiography. ***"Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. 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."*** Jesus is that son. After rejection of all God's prophets, including John the Baptist, God sent his son, born of a woman. Jesus spoke this parable on Tuesday of Holy Week. In three days he will hang on the cross because the people he came to save demanded his death.

II. What the parable means to US.

That is what the parable means. What does it mean to us? It first means we are saved. Unwittingly, the Jewish leaders fulfilled Jesus' words and God's plan for our salvation. They tried to take over the inheritance by killing the Son of God, but in the end their evil intentions was used by God. He used their hatred and murder to give up his Son as the Lamb who will die to take away the sins of the world.

And because Jesus saves us, he is a treasure to us. Jesus explains it this way. ***"Jesus said to them, "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"?"*** One man's garbage is another man's treasure. It still amazes me. If there is something you want to get rid of,

just put it on the curb and inevitably someone will take it home. You don't want money for it. Just get it out of the house. Now imagine if there was a solid bar of gold in your house weighing in at a standard 27 pounds. You had it for years and you didn't do anything with it. It is just collecting dust and taking up space so you put it on the curb. If you drove by and saw a bar of gold that says, "free," you would instantly snatch it up. A bar of gold like that would be over a half a million dollars.

That is what these people did with Jesus. They had a treasure, a Savior and they threw him away. And what does the Lord do? He takes their garbage and makes him a treasure to us. Just look at what you have with him. The Bible clearly states that all who believe in him will have eternal life. With him we have the forgiveness of our sins, the promise of the resurrection of the dead, and life eternal. Of course, without him we do not have those things. We would still be in our sins, we would die, and we would face everlasting punishment which we so dearly deserve.

I think John captured this so well in his opening chapter: ***"He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become the children of God."*** God's own people rejected him, but Jesus becomes our Savior.

Because of Jesus we are part of something big. Read through Revelation. Yes, absorb all those terrifying scenes of war and destruction, armies of locusts, the four horsemen, the antichrist, demons, persecution and open hostility towards the Church of God, and plagues. Sounds like the headlines today. Yet, when you get to the last few chapters you find peace and joy, for this church will outlive all the rest of the world. It will last forever. And you are part of it. You are part of something really big.

And guess what? We are the new farmers tending God's vineyard. ***"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."*** Someone asks what you do at church. Here is a nifty response. Tell him you work here. Tell him you are working with others to bring the harvest to God.

God provides the vineyard, he provides the winepress and the tower, he provides us with everything. All we do is bring him the fruit. What are those fruits? We are talking about the fruits of faith. They include things like offerings, songs, serving others, peace, hope, charity, kindness, goodness, faithfulness. Other fruits includes people. At our sister church in Mankato, St. Mark's, they have a neat banner hanging above their baptism font. It says, "The only thing you can take to heaven with you is your children." Raising our children in the fear of the Lord are some fruits we bring. But don't think only of your children. You are still the best evangelists we have. You are out there. You know those who believe, and you know those who don't or who struggle or have no church. You can let the light of your faith shine.

One last fruit is ourselves. Repentance is that humility we have because we are condemned creatures before God, but rejoicing that by faith we believe in Jesus and are saved. As Paul said, let's offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God! We do this as we daily repent and offer him the fruits of our faith.

So, you work here. This is your vineyard. You work together to bring these fruits to God. But there is a warning here. Now, warnings often are scary, but they are also good for us. Telling someone to watch out when something falls is good. Jesus is warning us not to repeat history here. Jesus was a little sarcastic when he asked the leaders who were rejecting him, ***"Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone."*** Of course they read it, many times, but they never took it to heart. His generation was on the verge of repeating history. So he warned them by getting them to pronounce judgment on their own actions. ***"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" "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."*** How blind. How foolish. They were fulfilling this parable and it went over their heads; they continued to hate Jesus and brought this judgment on themselves.

And that is the warning to us. We are the new farmers tending God's vineyard. God is patient with us as he was with them, but if we reject him, he will reject us and will bring in new farmers to replace us.

Lord, may this not be. Instead, let's marvel at what God has done. Their garbage has become our treasure. Let's regard it as our treasure. Think about it. We are forgiven, part of God's kingdom, and heirs of eternal life because of Christ. Now let's bring to him the fruits he so deserves, and let people know that we have a real treasure here, not garbage. INJ Amen.