

The Stone That Crushes  
Luke 19:41-44, 20:9-18  
July 3, 2022  
Rev. Dave Dorst  
CenterPoint Church

Read Luke 19:41-44, 20:9-18

*“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*  
(Hebrews 4:12)

### **Introduction**

A man named Robert Schrader runs an online vacation site where he gives travel advice. I’m not recommending it because I haven’t read much, but I did see one article that he wrote about why his love for San Francisco has soured so much. He says that after visiting the city for the first time in 2004, he really loved it. But now he hates it for a number of reasons: regular people have been priced out of housing, the homeless problem, the fact that the city is in denial that there’s a homeless problem, and the epidemic of addiction. He ends the list concluding, “I hope I won’t be able to say that I hate San Francisco forever. One of my biggest travel dreams is to return to the city next year – or maybe in 10 – and be blown away by how much it has changed... But I’m not holding my breath. San Francisco isn’t dying – it’s already dead... it’s beyond repair.”<sup>1</sup>

Now I have not been to San Francisco since the late nineties, so I don’t know whether what he says is true from my own experience, but I have certainly heard others confirm that. It’s sad when a city that you love is going downhill, we’d all much rather that the towns we live in and love be governed well and flourish, but that’s not always the case. Today’s passage sees Jesus lamenting a city that He loves that He knows is on the decline because of the choices that it has made. He knows its future and that future is bleak. He actually wept as He looked out over it, knowing that the events had been set in motion that would lead both to His death and to the city’s eventual destruction.

Jerusalem, the city that Jesus lamented, was a city of contradictions.<sup>2</sup> It was a city where the most devout Jews went to worship God in His glorious temple, yet it also attracted the crooked moneylenders that Jesus said were turning it into a den of thieves. It was the Holy City, the “city of the Great King David” (Matthew 5:35), its name literally means “Foundation of Peace” (Jeru = foundation, shalom = peace).<sup>3</sup> And yet it was also described as *“the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it”* (Luke 13:34). Let’s see what Jesus’ message to the city and its inhabitants was in the days between His triumphal entry and His arrest and crucifixion. The first passage shows us His

### **I. Tears for the City (19:41-44)**

*<sup>41</sup> And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, <sup>42</sup> saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. <sup>43</sup> For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side <sup>44</sup> and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation.”*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://leaveyourdailyhell.com/2020/04/12/i-hate-san-francisco/>

<sup>2</sup> Thomas G. Long, *Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster, 1997), p. 233.

<sup>3</sup> Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke* (Nashville: Holman 2018), p. 287.

Jesus had recently wept over Lazarus' death even though He knew that He would raise Him from the dead. Here we wept over the high holy city of His people, Jerusalem. The events He prophesied about in verses 43-44 happened in AD 70, roughly forty years after His death. Everything Jesus predicted here came true, this was not a vague, metaphorical prophecy; every detail would happen. The Roman general Titus and his army would come to Jerusalem, setting up a siege which eventually gave way to them destroying the city and the temple. Apparently, the only part of the temple that the Romans left standing were the towers because they wanted to leave behind some indication of the massive structure they had destroyed. According to the historian, Josephus, when all the destruction was done, General Titus, was filled with remorse for how completely his army had destroyed the city and, "threw his arms heavenward, uttered a groan, and called God to witness that this was not his doing."<sup>4</sup>

Now, there were very political reasons that the Romans came and destroyed Jerusalem – there were smaller conflicts that had broken out between the Jews and the Romans leading up to the invasion. But Jesus declared that there were more than political reasons, there were spiritual reasons. The last phrase in verse 44 explains the cause of why Jerusalem would be destroyed: "*because you did not know the time of your visitation.*" What does that mean? It means that Jesus, the Incarnate God in the flesh had come to His people, Israel, and they had, for the most part rejected Him. Was Jesus angry? No, He was weeping that they would not be able to avoid the terrible fate that would come for them. He was torn up that His own people rejected Him, the last in a long line of ways that Israel disobeyed and grieved their God. God used the Romans to enact his punishment on His people.

It is self-destructive to reject the One who was sent to seek and to save the lost. That message is amplified in a parable that Jesus told in the next chapter. It witnesses several acts of violence:

## **II. Beatings for the Servants and Death for the Son (20:9-15a)**

*<sup>9</sup> And he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. <sup>10</sup> When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup> And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup> And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. <sup>13</sup> Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' <sup>14</sup> But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' <sup>15</sup> And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.*

So the gist of the conflict in the story is that the owner of the vineyard tried to collect his share of the tenants' fruits, to which he was rightly entitled. It was time for them to send him some of their finest grapes or bottles of wine. But they were so insolent and greedy to keep what they'd grown that they refused to send him anything, and when he sent servants to collect, they kept beating them and sending them back empty-handed. The ultimate act of defiance was the killing of the son. It's one thing to beat up a servant, sending him away with a bloody nose, a black eye, and nothing to show for his efforts. It's a different thing entirely to kill the boss's beloved son. The tenants were apparently under the assumption that if they killed the son then the inheritance would become theirs. There is some logic to that – not that the vineyard owner would suddenly decide to give them the vineyard out of the kindness of his heart, but that if he died without an heir, then the tenants would automatically inherit it. In fact, even a three-year absence of a landlord in that day could allow a tenant farmer to take possession of the land.

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<sup>4</sup> Clarence E. Macartney, *Salute Thy Soul* (New York: Abingdon, 1957), p. 84.

Who do the characters in this parable represent?

- The vineyard owner is God the Father

- The tenants are the spiritual leaders of Israel

- The vineyard stands for the nation of Israel in the Promised Land; it's a familiar image throughout the writings of the prophets, who referred to God planting a vineyard; Isaiah 5:7, for example, says, "*The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel.*"

- The servants who were sent are the prophets from Israel's history

- The son, of course, is Jesus Himself

This parable reminds us of God's great patience, that He did not destroy those who mistreated His prophets immediately. God was constantly sending prophets to rebuke and bring the people to repentance to restore their obedience to Him. And the history of Israel was full of the people ignoring and abusing those prophets. Isaiah was sawn in two under King Manasseh, Jeremiah was arrested and thrown into a pit, Zechariah was stoned to death in the temple, John the Baptist was beheaded. Hebrews 11:37-38 says, "*they were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword... afflicted, mistreated... wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.*" Right before Stephen died, he criticized the religious leaders in Acts 7:52: "*Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One.*"

Despite all of that, God's final plan to reach His people was to send His Son. Now, Jesus told this parable knowing that He was at the end of His life and would be killed. He was very clearly explaining why they were going to kill Him. The Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, all the religious leaders saw Him as a threat because had forgotten their role in God's kingdom. They had forgotten that they were just put in charge of things to represent God, they were not the owners. Yet they acted like the true owner had died and they had inherited it. They made all their decisions for how it would best serve them and their positions. They gave no thought to God's priorities for His people. If they did recognize Jesus as God's Son, they quickly suppressed that knowledge and decided that He had to die for them to get their way and own the vineyard Israel for themselves.

The end of the parable shows that things would not go well for the tenants:

### **III. Destruction for the Defiant Rebels (20:15b-18)**

*What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup> He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!" <sup>17</sup> But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'? <sup>18</sup> Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."*

The son has been the final word of warning to the tenants. He had been their last chance to turn things around and be the responsible workers they had been hired to be. But they had failed, just as the religious leaders of Jesus' day had. So verse 16 ends the parable with the assurance that the vineyard owner will both require the tenant's lives for killing his son and then he will find new tenants. And so we circle back to the first section and Jesus' lament over the destruction of Jerusalem: in the coming years, God would take the kingdom out of the religious rulers' hands, allowing Jerusalem itself to be destroyed, and He would see the new tenants of His kingdom established: the church and its leaders.

It's so interesting to me that God destroyed the opposite nation than His own people expected Him to destroy. They assumed He would destroy Rome that ruled oppressively over Israel; they thought

that their liberation would be coming in a similar way to God bringing the Israelites out from Egypt under Moses' hand. But God did the opposite: He used Rome to destroy Jerusalem and punish Israel and her leaders. That's probably what made all the people gasp in verse 16: "*Surely not!*" We're reminded that we shouldn't expect God to deal with those outside the church when He has lessons to teach His own people. I think there's a real parallel to the church today when we look around at the world and plead for God to do something about all the immorality. God will do something when it fits His plans, but we first should be looking for the ways that we are rejecting Him and being disobedient to His ways. Absolutely, pray for the world and pray for the kingdom to come in every way that it can. But if we as the church have walked away from the Bible as God's word or no longer emphasize Jesus as the only way to salvation, God may be snuffing out our light and keeping us from being a bad witness in the world. 1 Peter 4:17 says, "*For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*" Every church in America should take stock of its ministries, its purposes and plans, and weigh whether they are running their churches for their own goals and interests or whether they have embraced God's goals for His kingdom. Are we following the Great Commission, spreading the good news of Jesus, teaching everything that He commanded, being His agents of reconciliation in the world? Or are we just social clubs designed to make us feel good about our lives?

We see this on an individual level as well. I'm not a fan of everything that the author Donald Miller has written, but I will never forget a true story that he told in his book, *Blue Like Jazz*. He attended a very liberal college in Oregon, Reed College, that had a tradition of one night of just a completely wild, crazy "anything goes" outdoor party on the campus called Ren Feyre. Donald was part of a very small Christian group on campus who talked about how they could represent Jesus in the midst of this crazy sinfulness, so he proposed setting up a confession booth in the middle of campus as a joke. But one of his friends loved the idea, with one twist: that instead of people coming in to confess to them, they would confess their own sins to anyone who came by: "We are going to confess that, as followers of Jesus, we have not been very loving; we have been bitter, and for that we are sorry... Jesus said to feed the poor and to heal the sick. I have never done very much about that. Jesus said to love those who persecute me. I tend to lash out, especially if I feel threatened... We will tell people who come into the booth that Jesus loves them."<sup>5</sup> Donald says that he talked and confessed to over 30 people that night and most of them forgave him and wanted to hug him afterwards. What a difference it makes when we start with our own sins rather than pointing out the sins of the world. God calls His people to radical obedience and desires for us to look like Jesus; that will take a humble attitude and a lot of repentance before we call out the sins of those who don't follow God. That's something the Pharisees never learned.

Verse 17 - "*The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone*" is from Psalm 118:22. The Apostle Peter loved quoting that verse to talk about Jesus - first quoting it in Acts 4:11 when he defended himself in front of the Jewish rulers who had arrested him, and then in his first epistle, 1 Peter 2:4-8. I want to read that whole passage because it really expands what Jesus was saying:

*"<sup>4</sup>As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, <sup>5</sup>you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup>For it stands in Scripture: 'Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.' <sup>7</sup>So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,' <sup>8</sup> and 'A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense.' They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do."*

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2005/summer/4.62.html>

A cornerstone is the key piece that must be in place; all of the other stones will be set in reference to that stone. Jesus is the cornerstone of the whole Bible, the One that the whole story of redemption is built around. He is the most important stone in God's building of His kingdom. At the same time these texts say that He is a stumbling block – you either build your spiritual house upon it or you stumble over it and are ultimately crushed by it.

### **Conclusion**

Let's go back to Jesus' lament in 19:44: *"Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!"* That is the same lament we have for those who don't know Jesus today – that they would know "the things that make for peace." When Jesus died on the cross for our sins, He fulfilled God's law and made it possible for us to have true peace with our Heavenly Father. Romans 5:1 – *"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."* All the anger of God toward the sin of human beings is satisfied in the Son's death, for those who accept it. Not only are we not at enmity, at war with God anymore, but we do not have to keep striving to justify ourselves. We are made righteous in His sight, we are made whole, given the true shalom of God. Faith in Christ and repentance of our sins brings us peace with God and eternal salvation.

What is the one Bible verse that everybody in church used to know, even those who didn't know anything else about the Bible? John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."* Verses 17-18 go on to say, *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God."* This parable focused on God punishing those who rejected Jesus and had Him killed, but we also understand throughout the Scriptures that those who embrace the Son and receive His sacrificial death on their behalf will be saved and have everlasting life.

➔ Transition to Communion

### **Benediction**

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 – *"Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word."*