

*And this is eternal life, that we know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom  
You have sent. (RISE)*

**Glo - ry be to Thee, O Lord!**

**Luke 20:9–20 (NKJV)**

- 9** Then He began to tell the people this parable: “A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country for a long time.
- 10** Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the vinedressers beat him and sent him away empty-handed.
- 11** Again he sent another servant; and they beat him also, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed.
- 12** And again he sent a third; and they wounded him also and cast him out.
- 13** “Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.’
- 14** But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.’
- 15** So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them?
- 16** He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others.” And when they heard it they said, “Certainly not!”
- 17** Then He looked at them and said, “What then is this that is written: ‘The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone’ ?
- 18** Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.”
- 19** And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people—for they knew He had spoken this parable against them.
- 20** So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, that they might seize on His words, in order to deliver Him to the power and the authority of the governor.

*These words are written that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, we may have life in His name.*

**Praise be to Thee, O Christ!**

**PRAY: Let the words of our mouth and the meditation of our heart be acceptable in  
Your sight, O LORD, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.**

**The Only Stone Upon Which God Builds**

1. Rejected by Leased Workers
2. Resurrected by God
3. Given to Us – the Chief Cornerstone of the Church

Pilgrims of the heavenly pilgrimage, elect according to the foreknowledge of the Father, sanctified by the Spirit, and sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ, grace to you and peace be multiplied.

Jesus quotes Psalm 118: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.” It was customary to sing this psalm at the time of the Passover. The festival which is just days away will mark the fulfillment of Jesus’ words. He will be handed over to the Roman government by His own people – the stone which is rejected. However in three days following the crucifixion, God will demonstrate that this was the fulfillment of His great work of salvation. He will raise Jesus from the dead. Upon this Chief Cornerstone, God begins the building of His NT Church. No other stone can provide the foundation for our eternal hopes than His beloved Son – rejected by the Leased Workers, resurrected by Him, and given to us – the Chief Cornerstone of the Church.

## 1. Rejected by the Leased Workers

The religious leaders recognize exactly what is being taught in this parable. They know well the Messianic implications of Jesus’ reference to Psalm 118. The problem for them is that they see this psalm as referring to a mere earthly liberation. They see the Messianic deliverance not in terms of humiliation for the sake of their sin; rather they see deliverance in terms of exaltation for the sake of the Jewish nation’s righteousness. To the contrary, the message of Jesus was the message of repentance, not works. He was the stumbling stone upon which the religious elite tripped. The Father’s Chosen Stone, the beloved Son was rejected by the Leased Workers.

The Old Covenant can rightly be thought of as a lease – a two sided agreement. When God appeared to Moses on Mount Sinai He laid down the terms of a holy contract. And then, in a sense, we see Him journey to “a far country” until the time of Christ. In the mean time, He sends prophets to represent Him and reveal His will.

***10 Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard.***

When, literally, “the season” drew near, God comes to collect, to check in on the status of His farm. The number “three” in Scripture often symbolizes completion. The time of the Old Covenant has drawn to a close. God repeatedly sent prophets – Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, and many more – calling the people to faith. We read of this in 2 Chronicles –

*And the Lord God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy. (2 Chronicles 36:15–16)*

Seeing His prophets are rejected again and again, He does not stop. He sends His beloved son, thinking, they will surely respect Him.

As in so many of Jesus' parables, He here demonstrates a profound teaching with an exaggerated example. It really makes no sense for the caretakers to think they can claim the inheritance by simply killing the heir. They are the leased workers. Why would they be the one to receive the owner's property and wealth?

Jesus demonstrates how far the religious leaders have strayed and how blind they really are. Trying to gain God's inheritance by their own works and political maneuvers is an empty pursuit. To gain God's inheritance on the basis of the Old Covenant is an impossibility. The Law is a lease that demands complete compliance. Down to the smallest letter, this two-sided requires perfect holiness.

We can think of ways we've broken this lease too. How often do we think, if I do things this way or if I turn God that way, then the inheritance will be mine? We tend toward this in one way or another. When times are tough especially. Perhaps we might lose our job or maybe we're looking for a new one. Do we tend to trust in our own effort, our own determination, our own resume? When marriage problems arise, how often does the husband think it is just a matter of common sense that will fix it, when really it is a matter of repentance and love that is needed? When we have difficulty overcoming weakness – a short temper, a drinking problem, disrespect toward parents and superiors. How often do we rely on ourselves to deal with it; how right it is that we are too ashamed to ask for help?

A lease only lasts so long. Pretty soon the other party comes looking for payment. God knew we could never live up to the terms of His contract. And so He sends His Son – not to collect payment, but to provide payment.

## **2. Resurrected by God**

Psalm 118 says, "this was the LORD's doing." Though Jesus is rejected, God will raise Him back to life, declaring the payment complete. The resurrection declares Jesus "the Chief Cornerstone" of our salvation.

For Jesus to be killed outside the vineyard was significant. "They cast Him out of the vineyard." Jesus was delivered into the hands of Gentiles. He died the cursed death – the cross. By allowing this, God was demonstrating that Jesus was cast out from His presence. He had become to God a criminal; He carried our guilt.

Acts chapter 4 records Peter being seized by the priests and Sadducees. He has performed a performing a miracle by healing a lame man and they want answers. We read, "they were greatly disturbed that [disciples] taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." When Peter is given a chance to speak he refers

the religious leaders to Psalm 118, saying – *let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* (Acts 4:10–12)

When you suffer, when loved ones are sick, when you face seemingly insurmountable obstacles – stand on this Stone: the resurrection of our Lord. The resurrection declares Jesus to be the Son of God, the chosen foundation of God’s people. Like that lame man, in Jesus name we receive the wholeness of God’s salvation. The resurrection declares that the payment of death was satisfied; it declares your sins forgiven; it puts an end to the curse which sin imposes; it promises you the everlasting deliverance of heaven. This is the foundation upon which to rest. As Psalm 118 says, “this was the LORD’s doing, it is marvelous in our eyes.”

### **3. Given to Us – the Chief Cornerstone of the Church**

No longer is the vineyard “leased out.” We read: “He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others” (v.16). The two-sided contract of the Old Covenant has been fulfilled by Jesus. No longer are your lack of good works held against you; no longer are your sins held against you. We stand on the foundation of our Savior’s resurrection.

There has been extensive media coverage of the election of the new pope. So many look to him as the hopes for moral reform in the Church. At a time when the eyes of the world turns to one man, we continue to build on God’s living Stone, the One who Speaks the same Truth He did 2000 years ago. It is ironic that the Apostle Peter form the basis for the teaching of papal succession ... It is ironic because this same Peter writes that the foundation of the New Covenant priesthood is not a hierarchy – it is the bedrock of believers:

*[Come] to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect, precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame.” Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,” and “A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into*

*His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. (1 Peter 2:4–10)*

The owner of the vineyard has not leased his vineyard to a select few religious leaders as He did under the Old Covenant. No longer is the preaching and teaching of the Word entrusted to an earthly lineage. Under the New Covenant, all believers comprise the spiritual lineage, a priesthood of Jews and Gentiles alike.

You have been given the work of priests – to forgive sins, to teach and preach the gospel. It is in this authority from Christ that you have called me. As your pastor I stand in your behalf – preaching and teaching, admonishing and forgiving.

Don't look for a pope to bring moral reform into your life, into the church, or into our nation; don't look to the pastor, or the CLC for this. Rather, rest on the true foundation – Jesus Christ.

The pastor is a shepherd, sent to by God to guide, to care for, to equip you for growth; Pastors are here to lead you into the spiritual truths of the gospel; but they are only as reliable as they firmly stand on Christ. Only the Word can confirm truth and cause growth. Only Christ can give you confidence in your forgiveness. Only the Spirit can reforms our sinful lives by the faith which He creates. And so we come to Word and Sacrament for just this – to be built on something solid.

*[you are] built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:20–22)*

Maybe you heard about this golfer a few weeks ago. He was out golfing when he suddenly fell into a sink hole. You can hardly trust the ground under your feet!

When you see your failures shaking the ground beneath – stand on this foundation. When your struggles with sin seem a crumbling sink hole – stand on the Only Stone upon which God builds. When worries make you uneasy – the future of our children, the future of our nation – rest on the Chief Cornerstone. Go to Psalm 118 and remember His resurrection. Place your worries, your sins, your children, your future on Him. God's beloved Son has risen from death and lives and reigns forever. He is the Chief Cornerstone of the Church. He is the only Stone upon which God builds. Amen.