

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

October 4, 2020

Psalm 80:7-19 (NIV) ⁷Restore us, O God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved. ⁸You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. ⁹You cleared the ground for it, and it took root and filled the land. ¹⁰The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches. ¹¹It sent out its boughs to the Sea, its shoots as far as the River. ¹²Why have you broken down its walls so that all who pass by pick its grapes? ¹³Boars from the forest ravage it and the creatures of the field feed on it. ¹⁴Return to us, O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see! Watch over this vine, ¹⁵the root your right hand has planted, the son you have raised up for yourself. ¹⁶Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire; at your rebuke your people perish. ¹⁷Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. ¹⁸Then we will not turn away from you; revive us, and we will call on your name. ¹⁹Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.

Isaiah 5:1-7 (NIV) ¹I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. ²He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. ³"Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? ⁵Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed; I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. ⁶I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it." ⁷The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is

the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

Philippians 3:4-14 (NIV) ⁴though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. ¹²Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 21:33-46 (NIV) ³³"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. ³⁴When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. ³⁵"The tenants seized his servants; they beat

one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. ³⁸"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.' ³⁹So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹"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." ⁴²Jesus 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'?" ⁴³"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. ⁴⁴He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." ⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Forfeiting the Kingdom—Outline

Matthew 21:33-46

⁴³"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."

- ❑ **The fruit of the kingdom**
(verses 33-34; 43; Isaiah 5:3-4; Psalm 80:7; John 15:1-2, 8; Philippians 1:9-11)
- ❑ **The rejection of the King**
(verses 35-42a; Luke 9:22; 10:16)
- ❑ **The vindication of the King**
(verse 42 Acts 4:8-12)
- ❑ **Losing the kingdom**
(verse 43-46; Hebrews 2:3-4; 3:12-13)

Truths to live by:

- Jesus is looking for fruit in the lives of his followers (John 15:8)
- God is patient toward us, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9)
- Jesus was rejected so we wouldn't experience rejection by Him. (Deuteronomy 31:8; Matthew 28:20)
- We are warned NOT to turn *away from the living God*, and so forfeit the salvation Jesus came to bring. (Hebrews 3:12-13)

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25

Forfeiting the Kingdom

Matthew 21:33-46

Rejection is one the harshest realities we can face as human beings. I'm sure all of you can recall a painful experience of rejection. Perhaps even today the wound of that incident is still tender.

Pop Star, Taylor Swift, recounts that she started writing songs because she felt so lonely and left out in high school. I'm sure a lot of her classmates wish they'd payed more attention back then to that gangly girl with a guitar.

At times, I've felt the sting of rejection. Growing up, I was a scrawny kid and not very athletic—so, as I've mentioned here before, I was always picked last when boys chose up teams for baseball or kickball. As a high school freshman, I was all of 5 ft tall and 100 lbs. I screwed up the courage to ask my 9th grade science teacher, who was the track coach, about trying out for the team. Just before class started, I went up to his desk and said, “Mr. Siebold, I'd like to try out for track. I'm not very fast but I have a lot of endurance. Is there a mile or two-mile event I could run?” Mr. Siebold just looked at me, sizing me up, and then laughed. He didn't say a word, he just laughed. I slunk back to my desk feeling foolish, thinking I'd asked a stupid question.

My sophomore year, I was assigned to write an article for our school newspaper on the cross-country team. I took the bus out with the team to a wooded area to watch a practice. I thought, “here was a sport I could do!” By 11th grade, I had grown a lot, and gained more confidence, and went out for cross-country.

By the time track season rolled around, I'd become a decent runner, so I showed up for practice. I'll never forget Mr. Siebold coming up to me. He said, “Johnson, aren't you a junior?” “Yeah coach I am.” He asked, “then why did you wait till 11th grade to come out for track? Why didn't you try out sooner?”

I looked him square in the eye and said, “Because Coach, when I was a five-foot freshman and asked you if I could run track, you laughed at me!”

Coach Siebold just turned and walked away, muttering to himself.

But I felt vindicated! By my senior year I was our school's best distance runner and elected captain of the cross-country team and co-captain of the track team. But Coach Siebold never apologized.

I share this only because the pain of rejection, and the triumph of vindication, are so woven together in the fabric of human experience—that they are a touchstone for all of us. But there is no comparison between my life and our savior's—not the depth of rejection He suffered, nor the height of glory (and vindication) He received.

Jesus was no stranger to rejection. Last week we learned about those who rejected Jesus, and His authority over their lives, because of their unbelief, and how they missed the *way of righteousness* because of it.

Today we will hear about those who, by their unbelief and rejection of Jesus, forfeited the kingdom of God.

And that's the title of today's message: ***Forfeiting the Kingdom.***

The key to today's gospel lesson is verse 43:

“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.”

The parable Jesus told, was about a landowner, who established a vineyard, and rented it out with the expectation of receiving its fruit.

As our Psalm for today and Old Testament lesson illustrate, the grape vine was a well-known image of Israel.

The people who heard Jesus, immediately knew what He was talking about.

Behind where Jesus was teaching, the massive doors of the temple sanctuary were adorned with a gold relief of a vine and giant clusters of grapes.

In this parable Jesus first spoke about the

The fruit of the kingdom

³⁴When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

The purpose of the vineyard was to produce fruit.

Our Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 5 (known as the Song of the Vineyard) makes this abundantly clear:

³Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?

Psalms 80, which was read this morning, makes the same point: *⁷The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.*

In John 15:1-2 Jesus said:

¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. (NIV)

He goes on to say (in verse 8):

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (NIV)

The apostle Paul prayed for the Christians in Philippi:

⁹And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, ¹¹filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus

Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:9-11 ESV)

In Jesus Christ, God saved us and gave us His Holy Spirit in order to be filled with the fruit of righteousness.

The vineyard owner expected to receive its fruit.

So, at harvest time, the owner of the vineyard sent his servants to collect what was his. This was a routine practice then, and it continues to today.

LaSalle Country, where we lived in Illinois, has arguably the most productive farmland in the world, with some of the highest yields of corn and soybean crops.

Most of the land there is not farmed by the owners, but rented out on a cash basis or for a certain percentage of the crops harvested. When a farmer retires, there's a lot of talk about who will acquire the rights to work that land. It was a much sought-after privilege.

So, the attitude and actions of the tenant farmers in Jesus' parable was, and is, scandalous! Instead of receiving fruit, the landowner experienced rejection.

And so, this parable of the kingdom poignantly illustrates:

The rejection of the King (verses 35-42a)

³⁵The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.

These wicked workers acted as if the vineyard belonged to them, and that they could reject the rent collectors with impunity!

And what is even more scandalous in this parable, is the patience of the vineyard owner in the face of that rejection! Again, and again, and again, he gave the tenants opportunity to give what is due him.

No business owner would put up with that kind of insubordination, disrespect, and outright lawlessness.

And in this way Jesus illustrates the long-suffering patience of His heavenly father, who finally sends his son as his personal emissary to these intractable tenants.

³⁷Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

And even then, these renters delude themselves in thinking they can kill the heir and keep the vineyard as their own.

Early on, Jesus warned His disciples in Luke 9:22 that He would face just this kind of rejection *saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."* (ESV)

Jesus also warned his disciples in Luke 10:16 that they too would face rejection:

"The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me." (NASB)

But Jesus also prophesied that just as His death would be the rejection of the King, His resurrection which would be:

The vindication of the King (verse 42)

⁴²Jesus 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?"

Jesus was scathing in His rebuke to these religious leaders: *"Have you never read in the Scriptures?"* It was as if Jesus said, don't you know your Bible? He then quotes from Psalm 118:22-23. They certainly knew this Scripture. It was very familiar to every Jew because it was sung whenever they entered Jerusalem and went up to the temple. It was the song the Passover pilgrims

were singing when Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem just days before; they had then proclaimed the words of Psalm 118:26, *"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."*

It wasn't that they hadn't read this Scripture, but that they had not grasped its meaning. Jesus himself was that stone the builder's rejected.

Later, the Apostle Peter used this very verse in his defense before these same religious leaders, powerfully proclaiming that the resurrection vindicated Jesus' claim as the Messiah.

Acts 4:8-12 reports the account: *⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, ¹⁰then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. ¹¹He is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone'. ¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* (NIV)

Even then, they rejected that message!

For the Chief Priests and the Pharisees, their rejection of Jesus as the Christ—the Messiah—meant

Losing the kingdom (verse 43-46)

Jesus said in verse 43, *"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. ⁴⁴He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."*

The chief priests and the Pharisees thought that the kingdom of God belonged to them by virtue of their positions. They didn't see themselves as renters or stewards, but as owners—entitled to keeping the fruit of the

kingdom for themselves. For their arrogance, the kingdom was taken away from them.

On this point there was no mistaking about whom Jesus was speaking:

⁴⁵When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them.

⁴⁶They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Jesus, in telling these parables, set the stage for his own death. Even though the chief priests and the Pharisees knew that Jesus was talking about them, they did not respond with repentance and faith.

They remained hardened in their unbelief and sought to arrest Jesus and put Him to death.

The book of Hebrews gives a warning to us also:

Hebrews 3:12-13 admonishes us: *¹²See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.* (NIV)

Hebrews 2:3-4 warns: *³how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.* (NIV)

If anyone rejects the gospel and grieves the Holy Spirit—hardening their hearts—and refusing to believe and receive Jesus, then *³how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?*

So, how can we apply these truths to our lives? Here are four

Truths to live by:

1. God is patient toward us, not wanting anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9)
2. Jesus is looking for fruit in the lives of his followers. *This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.* (John 15:8)
3. Jesus was rejected so we wouldn't be. Deuteronomy 31:8 *The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. . . .* " (NIV)
Jesus said . . . *and surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.* (Matthew 28:20)
4. We are warned NOT to turn *away from the living God*, and so forfeit the salvation Jesus came to bring. (Hebrews 3:12-13)

Let us pray . . .

Benediction: To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.

Jude 1:24-25

Children's Message with Ralph

Pastor Tim: Today Ralph is going to help me with the children's message. Hi Ralph!

Ralph: (Gloomily) Oh, hi Pastor Tim.

Pastor Tim: What's the matter Ralph? You look a little blue today?

Ralph: I do? (looking down at himself)
I'm always this color.

Pastor Tim: What I meant was, you look down in the dumps.

Ralph: Uh, I haven't been to the dump.

Pastor Tim: What I'm trying to say is, you look really sad . . . like you've lost your best friend.

Ralph: (Angrily) Well I am, and I did!

Pastor Tim: You did what?

Ralph: (sadly) I lost my best friend.

Pastor Tim: Ahh, that's terrible Ralph. Can you tell me about it?

Ralph: Ernie said he wasn't my best friend anymore. He said Timmy Tyler was his best friend now, and I was his second-best friend.

Pastor Tim: How did that make you feel?

Ralph: It made me feel rejected! I feel left out, like I'm not wanted anymore.

Pastor Tim: I'm sure Ernie still wants to be your friend.

Ralph: But not his BEST friend. I've been rejected!

Pastor Tim: Feeling rejected is really painful, Ralph. I have a best friend who was rejected too.

Ralph: You do? Who is that?

Pastor Tim: It's Jesus. The Bible tells us in John 1:11 that *He came to his own people, and even they rejected him.* (NLT2)

Ralph: How did it make Him feel?

Pastor Tim: Well, Jesus loved even the people who rejected Him. He loved them so much that He died for them on the cross.

Ralph: He wasn't sad they rejected Him?

Pastor Tim: Yes, it makes Jesus sad when anyone rejects Him, but He still loves them and wants them to become His friend. And the best news is that when we ask Jesus to be our best friend, he promises never to reject us.

Ralph: Jesus sounds like the best, best-friend ever!

Pastor Tim: He is Ralph. I hope you will forgive Ernie for choosing another best friend instead of you, just like Jesus forgives you for the things you do that hurt others.

Ralph: I'd like Jesus as my best friend . . . and I can still be friends with Ernie.

Pastor Tim: I'm glad you feel that way, Jesus is the best friend anyone could have, and He's not only our friend, but our Savior and Lord! That means He will always be with us forever, and never reject us!

Thank you for helping me out today
Ralph.

Ralph: But wasn't I suppose to help you with the children's message?

Pastor Tim: You already did Ralph. You already did.