OUR GOD IS A MARVELOUS LANDLORD!

1. See his great love
2. See his crushing judgment

Jesus told parable after parable about our Heavenly Father’s love. Jesus pictures God’s love for us as a father throwing his arms around his prodigal son. He pictures God’s love as the shepherd hoisting his lost sheep onto his shoulders and heading home rejoicing.

Today in God's Word he tells a parable that pictures God as a landlord. Now from time to time on TV you hear about the bad landlords who never fix up their properties and keep their tenants living in filth. In God's Word Jesus uses the picture of a great landlord to teach us some things we need to know. Let's come away from God's Word today seeing that OUR GOD IS A MARVELOUS LANDLORD! Let's see his great love and let's also see his crushing judgment.

Have you ever watched someone blow up a balloon and they get to a point where you almost winch a little bit as they try to get a little more air into that balloon? You get the feeling that if any more air is blown into that balloon, it is going to pop. As Jesus speaks these words, there is that same sort of feeling around Jesus – something is going to happen. The opposition to Jesus was going to such a fevered pitch that something was going to happen very quickly.

These words were spoken on Tuesday of Holy Week in Jerusalem - just two days before Jesus was arrested. Jesus had driven out the money changers from the temple. The chief priests and teachers of the law were looking for any opportunity to put him to death. At the same time that we hear the shouts of opposition to the Lord, we hear the words of Jesus telling a parable of a marvelous landlord, trying to teach the people about God's great love and warn those who would be crushed by his judgment.

The Pharisees came to Jesus while he was teaching in the temple. They did not come to learn, they came to question his authority to be there preaching and teaching. Before the chief priests walked away, Jesus told them two parables. The first was the parable of the sons asked to go and work in the father’s vineyard we heard about last Sunday. Jesus taught about the Yes answer of faith God is looking for.

Now Jesus goes on into the second parable - the parable of the tenants. 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.

The landlord who owned this vineyard had some very bad tenants. Imagine this, when the landlord sent a servant to collect the rent, they beat him up and sent him away empty handed. One of the Greek words used in the Gospels to describe how shamefully the tenants treated the servants of the landlord means to tear off skin like when we fell on our bikes and skin a knee or elbow.

The Bible tells us after this parable that Jesus' words did not miss the hearts he was targeting. The Pharisees began to make the connection between the way the tenants had been treated and the way the prophets God had sent had been treated. Remember in our
Old Testament lesson how God said in Isaiah: **The vineyard of the Lord almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight.** The Old Testament is filled with examples of how God's people abused the messengers God sent.

In our minds let's be careful not to think: **I would never do that!** Now I have never been in a congregation that has torn the skin off of a pastor or teacher, yet there have still been times when the things God has sent them to say to me have rubbed me wrong. The problem is not with the message God sent them to bring. The problem has been with me and with you. Our sinful nature hates what God's law says. It wants to tell God: **Mind your own business** when his law pokes into my heart. It wants to strike out at God and find fault, not only with the message, but with his messengers in order to take the focus off our sinfulness.

Against the setting of jaw dropping sinful audacity, Jesus teaches us about God's love. Instead of sending the police or armed servants to crush the tenants who well deserved his wrath, the landowner sends his son. **Last of all, he sent his son to them. They will respect my son, he said.** The one telling the parable that day was the Son God had sent. That Son went willingly to take upon himself all of the **in your face** sins that we, like the tenants, have committed boldly and out in the open. He also came to take the punishment for all the sins we have committed in secret which, if they ever came to light, would make our faces blush with embarrassment. Through one of those prophets who was treated shamefully God says: **Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning.** Let's live our lives in thankfulness to the landowner of everything who sent his Son to save us.

On the national news in the last few weeks we have heard many warnings. We heard about officials pleading with people to evacuate to higher ground in the face of a coming hurricane. In Jesus' parable, he shows them the crushing judgment of the landowner as he pleads with the people not to be crushed by God's judgment.

**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.** Sometimes when we see children and adults do wicked things, we look back and sort of shake our heads and wonder **Now how did you ever think you were going to get away with that.** In the same way, the wicked plan of the tenants makes no sense. It'd seem sort of foolish for the tenants to think that they could kill the landlord's son and the inheritance would be theirs to keep. Did they really think that the landlord would do nothing to them?

Yet Jesus was standing in front of people who were plotting to do the very same thing. Another one of those prophets who was mistreated spoke for God when he said: **As surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?** We can hear that same tone in Jesus' voice as he warns the people about rejecting him, some of whom were turning over in their minds how they were going to kill him. He did not want them to be crushed by God's judgment.

If you have ever had a car accident, you know that it does not take much of a collision to cause quite a bit of damage. If a car can be dented and smashed by a minor impact, we do not even want to think about the crushing judgment of the King of the Universe. Jesus talks about his crushing judgment in this last words of our text and he appeals to the people then and to us not to be crushed by his judgment. **Therefore, when**
the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?

Here this parable end in a unique way. He asks the people to supply the answer and then he accepts their answer. **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.**

The Pharisees and chief priests recognized that Jesus was speaking the parable about them. But would we recognize that Jesus is also speaking the parable about us. Let's ask ourselves if we have ever treated God's servants badly. Let's ask ourselves if we have neglected to hear God's plain Word or if we've at times, either in our deeds or in our thoughts, rejected it and loved other things more than him? Have we always lived the way our marvelous Lord who lets us live here wants us to live? No, we have not always lived the way God wants us to. Realizing that, let's run to our Savior. Let's not push Jesus away like many of the religious leaders of Jesus' day did.

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.** Those last words were very familiar to the people in Jesus’ day. The Jews sang them on happy occasions like when a new synagogue was built.

Jesus lets the people know that he is the one the builders rejected. But Jesus, the stone rejected, has become the capstone or the cornerstone. Jesus compares himself to the most important stone in a building. That capstone is a guide for all the other stones, just as Jesus direction to us and our lives. Jesus is the rock upon which we build our lives. We can depend upon him even when everything else is crashing down around us. When we are sick or when loved ones die, when we are lonely or scared, when we just do not know what to do, we find safety and comfort in the arms of Jesus.

What a different story Jesus is for those who reject him. For those who reject the Savior, judgment will one day come crashing down upon them. That is the point of Jesus’ words, **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. He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.**

One of my grandsons tried to pick up and move a heavy stone in our backyard. He could not do it by himself – he needed my help. Our marvelous Savior is the stone we build our lives on. Jesus carried the weight of my sins and your sins. By God's grace we will never have to feel the crushing weight of our sins. Let's never stop telling others about our marvelous landlord who owns the whole world, yet in love sent his Son. Amen.

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