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The Lord's Love Endures Even in Judgment Matthew 21:33-43

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Amen. The word from God through which Jesus speaks to us is Matthew 21.

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch tower. He rented it out to farmers and went away on a trip.

"When the fruit-harvest came, he sent his slaves to the farmers to get his fruit. The farmers took his slaves. They beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first. And they did the same to them.

"Finally, he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'

"When the farmers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and have his inheritance.' They took him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

"So, when the lord of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?"

They said to him, "He will brutally destroy those brutes and rent the vineyard out to other farmers, who will pay him the fruit at harvest time."

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone, which the builders rejected—that one has become the cornerstone. This came from the Lord, and it's wonderful in our eyes.' Because of this I say to you that the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit." (Matthew 21:33-43)

Dear friends in Christ, fellow saints washed clean in the blood of our risen Savior:

"God is love, so he won't judge." That's a popular thought. Many use it to legitimize all sorts of immoralities. To counter that, others emphasize God's law. He has standards. He's given the Ten Commandments, not the ten suggestions. He will judge. The danger on this end, though, is that we lose sight of his love. God becomes only an angry god who always frowns. He's like that parent who's constantly criticizing without anything good to say at all. With a god like that either we fool ourselves into thinking that we're better than the rest or else we sink down under the weight of our own guilt. What a burden to worship a frowning god! Have you struggled with that?

God is love. God will judge. Even our own hearts abuse those two truths. Our sinful desires coaxes us: "Give in to that sin. It'll be fun. God will forgive you. Remember, God is love." Then afterwards, Satan blusters: "Don't you now that God has standards. You've blown it now. He's going to damn you to hell. God will judge."

God is love. God will judge. Can these two truths be balanced? That, though, is the wrong question. For that pits God's love and God's judging against each other. It

makes them like opposite sides of a teeter-totter. If you try to emphasize his love, it forces his judging down, and if you try to emphasize his judging, that pushes his love down. And even if it were possible to achieve some sort of balance, than neither one gets the proper emphasis.

Rather both are fully true. God is love and God will judge. They go hand-in-hand. There's no tension or balancing act within God. It's only our feeble understanding that fails to grasp the full truth. The God of the Bible, the God who reveals himself in the Scriptures, is the God who is love and the God who judges.

Jesus' parable of the vineyard brings out both the full love of God and the full justice of God. For you see, the Lord's love endures even in judgment. How extraordinary his love is! That's part one. And how worthy of our fruit his love is! That's part two. His love endures even in judgment. Keep that theme in mind.

A. How extraordinary his love is!

Jesus begins the parable: "There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower" (Matthew 21:33 NIV11). Already look at how vividly Jesus pictures God's love. Just planting a vineyard is hard work. The ground has to be cleared, the soil worked, the vines selected, planted and tended. But the Lord's love didn't stop there. His love spared no labor or expense. He built a wall and watchtower to protect his vineyard. He dug a winepress. Do you realize the work involved there? You couldn't order a winepress with a click of a button and have Amazon deliver it. It was dug out of a stone floor. An upper, shallow vat was dug where people would stomp the grapes. Connected to that was a lower, deeper vat where the juice would run. Sometimes a third or fourth vat was also dug so that the sediments could settle and the juice flow to the next lower one. All this was carved out of the stone floor. How lavish the Lord's love! How well he said it through the prophet Isaiah: "What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?" (Isaiah 5:4 NIV84).

The Lord's love provided all that his Old Testament people needed. And still today his lavish love provides all that we need for body and soul. How unworthy we are! How extraordinary his love is! Consider how he has planted you. He gave you physical life through your mother and eternal life through your baptism. Consider how he tends to your needs day by day, taking care of your physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health. Consider how he protects you better than any wall or watchtower, especially from that unseen foe who prowls around like a roaring lion and a ravenous wolf. How extraordinary his love his!

The parable continues, telling us that the landowner rented out the vineyard to farmers. So also, the Lord's love provided his Old Testament people with spiritual leaders: priests, Levites, rabbis, and scribes. Even the kings in Old Testament Israel were to be spiritual role models. But did these leaders follow the Lord? Read the Old Testament. Some were faithful. But many were not, and as time went on, it became worse down to Jesus' day.

But the Lord's love didn't abandon his vineyard. He sent his servants, the prophets, men like Elijah and Isaiah, Elisha and Jeremiah. But the majority, especially the leaders, did not believe the prophets' message. "The tenants seized his servants; they

beat one, killed another, and stoned a third” (Matthew 21:35 NIV11).

Up until now the parable has been realistic. You could picture a real life landowner doing these things. But at this point any ordinary landowner would have put an end to those tenants immediately. But how extraordinary the Lord’s love is! “Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way” (Matthew 21:36 NIV11). He kept calling them to repentance, hoping for faith.

How patiently the Lord deals with you and me! Each day we sin against him. We so easily give into our sinful desires often without much of a fighting. We are slow to do the good he places in front of us. But how extraordinary his love is! He has not given up on you or me. He continues to call each of us to repentance day by day. He calls to us through the written words of the prophets and through our brothers and sisters in Christ. How patient his love is! How extraordinary!

And we haven’t even arrived at the greatest gift of his love. “Last of all, he sent his son to them” (Matthew 21:37 NIV11). “He ... did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all” (Romans 8:32 NIV84). “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son” (John 3:16 NIV84). “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10 NIV84). “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8 NIV84). What extraordinary love!

But when his Son is rejected that’s when his love ends and the judgment begins, right? Wrong! Remember the theme. His love endures even in judgment. That’s how extraordinary his love is. The parable makes it perfectly clear that damning judgment will certainly come. It comes against all who harden their hearts, rejecting God’s Son. Don’t let misunderstandings about his love blur that stark truth. Jesus doesn’t even have to spell out the justice of that judgment. The people complete the parable for him: “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end” (Matthew 21:41 NIV11).

Where’s his love in this? First, remember that Jesus speaks this parable on Tuesday of Holy Week, three days before his crucifixion. This parable is his love calling out to his enemies, to the Pharisees and Saducees, the high priests and Sanhedrin: “Look at what you are about to do. You are about to kill God’s own Son, imagining you’ll get the inheritance. How foolish! Listen to the Holy Scriptures, which you so highly praise. I am that Cornerstone foretold. Don’t reject me and lose the kingdom. Rather, turn. Turn from your evil ways and live.” What love! What extraordinary love that endures even in judgment!

And secondly, even when God’s judgment takes his kingdom away from those who have rejected Jesus refusing to build on him alone as the Cornerstone, he doesn’t end his kingdom but in love gives it to others, even to undeserving sinners like you and me. What extraordinary love! The Lord’s love endures forever, even in judgment!

B. How worthy of our fruit his love is!

Why wouldn’t we bring him the fruit of the harvest! So great is his love toward us, his love that endures forever even in judgment! How worthy of our fruit his love is!

What is this fruit? Think back over the parable. Here is the fruit we can bring to

our loving Lord:

One, marvel at his love. Just as we noted the landowners diligence in preparing the vineyard, stand in amazement and awe at what the almighty God has done for you. The Apostles' Creed and Luther's explanation to each of the three articles summarizes the full extent of what the Lord's love has done for you, continues to do for you, and wants to accomplish in you. Ponder those words you memorized in Catechism class. That's one way to marvel at his love. For as we adore his love toward us, we are bringing him fruit, namely our adoration and praise.

Two, listen to the Bible. That's how his prophets still speak to us today. Don't be like those tenants who refused to listen to what the landowner's servants said. Take the Lord's word to heart and put it into practice. Believe his promises and do what he commands. This too is fruit. And why would we not want to listen to the One who has loved us so much? His love is worthy of our fruit.

Three, welcome his Son and build on him alone as your Cornerstone. That's the essence of faith. Faith welcomes Jesus as our only Savior, the One who took away our sin and reconciled us to God, the One who conquered death by his death and resurrection. He is the stone rejected by the builders, crucified outside the vineyard, but whom God raised up as the Cornerstone. Faith leans on him alone. Faith builds on him alone. He is your Cornerstone. Give to God that fruit, that fruit which is faith in Jesus.

Finally, see God's love enduring no matter how bad things become. Even in judgment his love endures forever. In fact when times are hardest, we may have the best opportunities to share his love with others and bring them into his vineyard. For his love endures forever. It endures even in judgment. How extraordinary his love is! So bring him the fruit of the harvest. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.