



## Rejected – Touchpoint for October 4, 2023

### Matthew 21:33-46 (NIV) The Parable of the Tenants

<sup>33</sup> “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 moved to another place. <sup>34</sup> When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

<sup>35</sup> “The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. <sup>36</sup> Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. <sup>37</sup> Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

<sup>38</sup> “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.’ <sup>39</sup> So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

<sup>40</sup> “Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?”

<sup>41</sup> “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.”

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes?’”

<sup>43</sup> “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. <sup>44</sup> Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

<sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. <sup>46</sup> They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

### **Grace and Peace to you from the mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.**

*“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. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.” (Matthew 21:43-44)*

As those of you who know me and my story are aware, I am not a theologian. I have never been to seminary and, if truth be told, I didn’t always pay attention in confirmation. So, breaking down Bible passages and creating a message does not come naturally or easily to me. So, my approach is not to try to teach or preach, but rather just talk about how this makes me feel. How it becomes a touchpoint for me.

Well, this parable, and quite a few others upsets me, and even makes me angry. First of all, I struggle to understand many of them. This despite attending Thursday morning Bible Study every week with some really smart people for the past few years and rarely missing our Wednesdays with [Jim Hanson](#) and attending Community of the Wild Goose with [Henry Rojas](#). Sometimes these just don’t make sense to me and I am often identifying with the wrong side. But, let me give this a try.

*Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed. (Matthew 21:44)*

Henry will often say the people in the recovery community, the alcoholics and drug addicts, are the lucky ones. They have been crushed by the stone over and over until they can come to terms with the idea they are powerless and unable to control themselves and the rest of the world. Then, and only then, can they be completely open and available to be healed, and become a cornerstone.

A friend of mine who is in AA was talking recently about a time when he was in and out of the program. He would get some significant sober time and then go back out, where his life would, again, fall apart. As he was in a car with a couple of guys from a treatment center, heading back to rehab once again, he was going on and on about what he needed to do. He needed to work on his spiritual life and he needed to go to more meetings, and he needed to do more of this and less of that.

Finally, one of the guys from the treatment center turned around and yelled, "Can you just shut up and be broken?" This guy now has over four years of sobriety and is a cornerstone of his community, helping many others to find a way back from their brokenness. He needed to be broken to pieces, to be crushed, before he could be healed.

As [Richard Rohr](#) says, "Our brokenness is the raw material of God's restoration. It is the occasion and opportunity for God to love. Our brokenness, weakness, limitation, and hurts are taken into God's hands, and there begin to reflect the glory of God. To paraphrase the words of the apostle Paul, 'Where our brokenness increased, the grace of God increased all the more.'

What is marvelous is that the surplus of grace through restoration is not only for us. Although living with drug abuse is horrible, we see some touched by God and then helping others that suffer from the same addictions. We see some that are released from prisons who then work to prevent youth from making the same mistakes. We know of those who profited from the exploitation of others who are now working for justice and freedom. God takes those areas that were damaged and destructive and uses them to bring restoration to those who are experiencing brokenness in similar ways."

One of the reasons I struggle to write these Touchpoints is that I end up going to places in my mind that are uncomfortable, places I normally choose to repress and keep buried. I do not know how Jim and Henry are able to do it on a weekly basis. It was much easier to tell Jim to let us see him wrestle with the passage than to do it myself.

Yet, I find myself looking at times in my life when I was the stone the builder rejected. Most recently, here at [Spirit in the Desert](#). After Richard Andersen had passed away suddenly and the Board was searching for the next executive director, I was a volunteer. I was then asked to join the staff part time to try organize the food service. While in that position, I was asked by one of the board members to apply for the executive director position, and I did.

Looking back in hindsight, I certainly did not check many of their boxes, or more accurately, did not check ANY of their boxes. In their eyes, I did not even warrant an interview as they offered the position to one and then another candidate. Neither of those candidates moved forward to accept the position and four months later I was given the opportunity to assume the role.

Over the past three and a half years, there have been many times when I wondered if the Board was right in the first place by overlooking me as a serious candidate. I have questioned my ability to lead this ministry. Maybe a big piece of the stone that left me broken and crushed ended up as a chip on my shoulder... left me needing to prove I belonged here, in this position, leading this ministry, without the credentials that were so important to those in charge.

I believe God has put me in this position, at this time, to continue this ministry of hospitality, and I believe what we are doing here is marvelous in our eyes. As we are preparing to celebrate our 30 years of ministry later this month, I have looked back at many of the people who came together to create and then lead this place. It is humbling to be a part of this and to look at what the future might hold. I believe now, more than ever, that we have a need to gather and share God's creation. We need to create an environment that opens hearts and eyes to God's healing and transformative powers. Even if you have been rejected, broken and crushed, you are welcome here to feel God's presence and become a cornerstone in your community.

As I look at where the ministry at Spirit in the Desert goes from here, I see so many opportunities to create additional areas of healing and transformation. Does that mean more programs, more partnerships, more buildings? Time will tell. I do know that we will continue to provide the environment, allowing God to touch those who come here seeking his presence.

Because I pay attention in Bible Study, I know today's message was leading toward the last week of Jesus' ministry, where he would be betrayed, denied, and broken, yet he shared a meal with his disciples. A meal where we share that same brokenness. So, come to the table where Christ's brokenness meets our brokenness. Where brokenness meets brokenness... and healing and resurrection are gifted.

**Amen**

## Opening Songs

### Be Still

(The London Fox Taize Choir, Remember Me)  
Be still, know that I am God

### Create in Me

(The Concordia Choir)

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.  
Cast me not away from thy presence and take not the Holy Spirit from me.  
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation and uphold me with thy free spirit.

## Bible Passage

*(A passage takes us from one place to another)*

## Touchpoint

*(Where God's story touches our life story)*

### In the Arms of God

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugan, Michael Joncas)

*Refrain:* Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear.

Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear.

For the burden you carry will fade within God's care. Come and rest in the arms of God.

- 1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace. *Refrain*
- 2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your soul's true rest. Fall in the arms of God. *Refrain*
- 3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God. *Refrain*

## The Meal

### Lord's Prayer

(Robert Stone, The Cambridge Singers, John Rutter)

## Benediction

### A Celtic Blessing

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you,  
The guarding of loving Christ be on you,  
The guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you,  
to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life.  
The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ,  
The guarding of the Spirit be upon you.