

Christ the Cornerstone

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Date: 25 January 2026

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[0 : 00] I want to begin by getting you to think about some of Glasgow's great buildings.! Kelvin Grove Art Gallery, the City Chamber, the Mitchell Library, the Riverside Museum,! Fir Hill Football Stadium, to name just a few.

Thousands of tourists flock to Glasgow every year to visit these and other great buildings in our city. We have much of which to be proud in Glasgow. But the buildings in our city pale into insignificance compared to the majesty of the temple in Jerusalem in Jesus' day.

It towered above every other building in the city. Its columns and its stones were a testament to the faith of the Jewish people and their God. Not just thousands, but hundreds of thousands, millions perhaps even, of Jewish people flocked to that temple every year, not so much to see the magnificent architecture, but to worship the God whose temple it was.

Although not listed as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple in Jerusalem really was a wonder. Think of the sense of awe you have sometimes when you stand in Kelvin Grove Art Gallery. Multiply it by a thousand, and perhaps you're getting close to that sense of awe Jewish worshipers must have had as they entered into that temple.

We have much of which to be proud in Glasgow's buildings, but the Jews had even more cause to be proud because their temple. It was the earthly meeting point between God and man. It was the holiest place on earth. Luke chapter 20 from verse 9 to 18 is the story of that temple. A story of grace and of gore, of beauty and of brutality, of wealth and of woe. But it's also the story of a temple greater than one made with bricks and mortar. It's the story of Jesus Christ as the ultimate meeting place between God and man. Jesus Christ, the cornerstone. I want us to try and understand this parable of the wicked tenants in this passage under four headings. Privilege, responsibility, response, and judgment. Until its destruction in AD 70, the temple in Jerusalem attracted millions of worshipers to its magnificent architecture. The question is this. Today, will you flock to God's bodily temple, the man Jesus Christ, to worship Him? And will you stand in awe before Him, the glory of His love and the majesty of His grace? First of all, privilege. Privilege. Our parable begins with a man who plants a vineyard and lets it out to tenants and then goes away for a long while. Now, for anyone who knows the Old Testament, as did the religious leaders of Israel, this imagery would immediately remind them of a song that God had sung about Israel hundreds of years before. Listen to this song. It's in Isaiah.

[3 : 34] Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard. My beloved has a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it out and he cleared it of stones and he planted it with choice vines. He built a watchtower in the midst of it. The vineyard was a very popular way for the Jews to describe themselves as a nation. So again, in Psalm 80 verse 8, the Jews sung these words to God. You brought a vine out of Egypt. You drove out of Egypt. You drove out the nations and you planted it. You cleared the ground for it. It took deep root and filled the land. Sometimes it is the land of Israel which is referred to as God's vineyard. But here in Luke 20, I want to suggest that Jesus is using the imagery of the vineyard to describe the temple in Jerusalem, the building, the temple. After all, from that song in Isaiah, the vineyard was planted on a very fertile hill, a referent surely to Mount Zion upon which the temple was built. Jesus is not referring here to the nation of Israel by speaking of how a man planted a vineyard, a vineyard, this man of course being God. He is referring specifically to the temple in

Jerusalem. For those of you who remember the old St. Vincent Street building in which we used to worship, it was extensively modeled on the architecture of the Jerusalem temple, even down to its interior decoration. Remember? For those of you who remember, it was full of garden imagery with clusters of grapes being a prominent motif. And in this it reflected the decoration of the temple in Jerusalem, which was also dominated by the motif of clusters of grapes and of wine.

We take great pride in Glasgow's building as Glaswegians. We call them ours. They're ours. But the Jews fell into the trap of thinking that the temple in Jerusalem was theirs.

But it never was. It was God's temple. As Jesus says in this parable, a certain man planted a vineyard. It was God's vineyard. It was only theirs because first it was His. It was God who had brought the nation of Israel from Egypt in the first place. We know the story of the Exodus, how God sent ten plagues upon the nation of Egypt, of how God divided the Red Sea to allow the Jews to escape.

We know the story of their desert wanderings, 40 years of being guided and provided for by God. We know the story of the conquest of Canaan under Joshua and God fighting Israel's battles for it.

[6 : 37] For hundreds of years, the nation settled down in the land of Canaan. But it wasn't until the days of King David that they finally conquered Jerusalem and set it as their capital city. And it wasn't until the days of Solomon. They built the temple on the highest peak in Jerusalem, Mount Zion.

We know the story, but we don't always remember it was the Lord who had done the fighting for Israel. It was the Lord who had defeated their enemies. It was the Lord who had built them up as a nation.

The temple wasn't a Jewish possession as much as it was their privilege. It was the grace of God poured out upon them as His people. They did not earn His blessing upon them. They did not merit His reward of them. It was a gift of His love and grace. Here we have a Lord who planted a vineyard on a fertile hill.

He cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest of vines. This is the grace of God. This is the indicative of the Old Testament gospel.

Well, what about us? We've had in our nation the Word of God in our language for 500 years. We've had gospel preaching churches for 500 years. We've had an evangelical witness in Scotland for 500 years. But what have we done as a nation with such grace from God? And what about us as individuals within this church? We've heard the good news of Jesus since we were barons. We've been repeatedly invited to share in the beauties and in the benefits of Christ's sacrificial death and His victorious resurrection. As a church, God planted His own vineyard here in Crow Road, and He cleared it of stones, and He set a watchtower in its mists. We have far greater privileges, far beyond those of the Jewish nation. Because whereas all they had was a building, we have a gospel. The gospel of the living

[8:53] Christ. Privilege. Second, responsibility. Responsibility. Well, the owner of the vineyard went away for a long time. He let it out to some tenants. The temple belonged to God, and He appointed the Jewish leadership as tenants to care for it, to maintain its services, to offer sacrifices to Him, to praise His name in song. He had given them everything they needed to do this. We talk about how we do everything by the book. And He even gave them a book to instruct them in how to be faithful to Him, the Old Testament. Well, after a while, the owner of the vineyard sent one of his servants to collect a portion of the harvest of grapes. In the context of Jesus' parable, speaking as He was in the temple, those God sent to collect the harvest from the temple were the Old Testament prophets.

In Zechariah 1 verse 6, God calls them, my servants, the prophets. Men like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Ezekiel. They spoke the truth of God to the leaders and the kings of Israel, calling them to return to the Lord in sincerity and in faithfulness. They called for a harvest for God, for the temple God had built to be used for the purposes for which it had been built.

You know, to those who have received great privileges are given great responsibilities. The nations around Israel were given no such privileges and therefore, not so required from God with a harvest.

They were not required to give such a harvest to God as was required from Israel. They weren't privileged with God's presence in the temple. They weren't privileged by the godly covenants, the godly prophets, but Israel was. The greatest building in Israel had been dedicated to the worship of God, to the offering of sacrifices, to the worship of His name, to the prayers of His people.

It was the place, the one place on earth where sinful men and women could draw close to their created and redeemer. With great privilege comes great responsibility.

[11:27] Going back to the Exodus, remember the preface to the Ten Commandments tells us, I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. There's your privilege, O Israel, God's miraculous work in saving you from the land of Egypt.

But with great privilege comes great responsibility. You shall have no other gods before me. In light of the grace of the Old Testament gospel, they must now put Him first.

This is the rhythm of the gospel, the rhythm of the gospel. Gospel indicatives come first, the explosive grace of God in saving a people for Himself, the story of redemption in our case, the grace, the giving of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross as the sacrifice for our sin.

The indicatives of the gospel are our privileges as Christians, our forgiveness, our justification, our adoption, our eternal life. Gospel imperatives come second, the commands of God to love Him with all our heart, soul, strength and mind and to love our neighbor as ourselves, to grow in the grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The imperatives of the gospel are our responsibilities, our response as Christians, our obedience, our worship, our praise.

[12:56] God has built His church with the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ. He has filled us with His Holy Spirit. He has bound us together as sons and daughters.

And now He calls us to go and make disciples of all the nations, to make this a place of prayer and worship, independence upon Him, to make this an embassy of heaven upon earth, where all kinds of people can find safety and can draw near to God.

The church is not meant to be a mirror of the world, reflecting back to it what the world has already said. It is to be a lighthouse of grace and the proclamation of Christ and Him crucified.

This is the vineyard of God on Crow Road, greatly privileged by God, but also given great responsibilities by God. Well, third, response, response.

Thus far, Jewish nations have been given great privileges. Upon them has been showered the love and grace of God and His presence in the temple. They could come nearer to the God who was their creator and their redeemer.

[14:15] But what had the nation of Israel done with their privileges? Two weeks ago, we saw what they had done. They had turned the temple from being a place of prayer into being a place where money changers made vast profits at the expense of the people.

They had excluded the nations from drawing close to God by closing off the court of the Gentiles and replacing it with a marketplace where animals could be bought and sold. The temple of God in Jerusalem had become a place of religious hypocrisy and political power plays, a place of rebellious plotting and anti-God sentiment.

There was no grace being preached. There was no praise being sounded. There was no prayer being made. Rather than the good news of God's love for the world being sounded forth from the towers of the temple in Jerusalem, the religious leaders of Israel had turned it into a place of Jewish exclusivity and racial hatred.

God had sent them many prophets to turn them away from their faithlessness and turn them back to Himself. But on each occasion, these prophets had been rejected. In our parable, we read of the first in verse 10 that the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

Was that Isaiah? Perhaps. We read of the second in verse 11 that they also beat him and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed.

[15:49] Was that perhaps Jeremiah? And of the third, that they wounded him and cast him away. This is the story of the temple. When God called His people back to Him through His prophets, His servants, these servants, these prophets, were mocked, beaten, and cast out.

But then, in an astonishing turn of events, one which you just couldn't predict, the owner of the vineyard sends his son saying to himself, verse 13, I will send my beloved son.

Perhaps they will respect him. The language of beloved son should ring bells on our heads, reminding us of God's words spoken to Jesus in His baptism in Luke 3, 22.

You are my beloved son. So, God is sending His beloved son, Jesus, as the last and final prophet. But what will the religious leaders of Israel do with Him?

They plot among each other, verse 14. Let us kill Him so that the inheritance may be ours. So they forcibly throw God's Son out of the temple and they kill Him.

[17:07] They dare not kill Him in the temple, make the temple unclean with the blood of the dead. As we read in verse Luke, 19, 48, the chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy Him.

They waited. They waited until He was alone in the garden. Then they arrested Him. And then they killed Him. They hung Him on a cross. The Jesus, who was daily teaching in the temple, speaking parables like this and calling God's people back to faithfulness to Him, was in just a few short days from this account arrested, tortured, and crucified just as He predicted He would be in this parable.

So what was the reaction and response of those to whom God had entrusted His temple? Those upon whom God had showered His love and grace, the religious leaders of Israel. They killed His beloved Son.

They refused to worship, glorify, and honor Him. This is all we need to know about their response. Not just apathetic, but entirely negative. The Jewish religious leadership had become the most anti-God group on earth, which goes to show just because someone is religious doesn't mean that they're right with God.

The most religious people in the world can be some of the most anti-God people in the world. And you know that's true. Well, today God comes to us as individual Christians and He comes to His church, sending His word and calling us to respond to Him.

[18:48] He has showered upon us His love and grace in the cross of His Son. Where then is the fruit? Where is the fruit? Where is our spiritual harvest for Him? Where is our obedience to the gospel imperative to love Him with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind and love our neighbor as ourselves?

What is our response in preaching the gospel and making disciples of all nations? Are we shining as the light of the world and the salt of the earth? Are we God's fertile vineyard when through preaching the word of God, God calls for a response?

What will we tell Him? Lastly, judgment. Judgment. How patiently God waited for the fruit of His harvest.

How He endured the rejection and mistreatment of His servants. But even the patience of God has a limit. Even the patience of God has a limit.

For when the tenants killed His beloved son, then the master's wrath was stirred. He came and destroyed those tenants and gave the vineyard to others. with their killing of God's beloved son, the crucifixion of Christ.

[20:05] The Jewish religious leadership had signed their own death warrant. As we'll see in but a few weeks' time, Jerusalem shall be destroyed and the temple wiped off the map forever. show of hands, how many of you have visited the Colosseum in Rome? Do you know the Colosseum in Rome was once entirely covered in gold?

So much so that it glimmered in the summer sunshine of Rome. The gold which covered the Colosseum came entirely from the temple in Jerusalem when the Romans destroyed it in AD 70.

Think of that. And at that point, the religious leadership of Israel was gone forever. No more scribes. No more Pharisees. No more Sadducees.

No more. It was all gone. And it's still gone. Well, the people knew only too well what Jesus was saying and so they replied to him in verse 16.

[21:05] Surely not. Dame Vida Lynn famously sang the song There Will Always Be in England. The Jews of Jesus' day thought there would always be a temple in Jerusalem and in this parable Jesus pulls the rug from their feet and predicts the destruction of the city and its temple.

Did our Victorian forefathers so famous for erecting Glasgow's churches ever think that over half of them today would be converted into flats climbing walls and temples to foreign gods?

Did they ever believe that the Church of Scotland not the Church in Scotland but the Church of Scotland would ever decline to the extent it has? Could it happen to our church?

There will always be a Crow Road Free Church of course it could happen to us. If we stop preaching the gospel if we turn into a social club for one particular culture or group if we stop worshipping God God could take away our lampstand and leave us entirely.

We must never take his grace for granted and so twist the gospel as to become a code of social ethics. We must never stop being awestruck by the glory of God or humbled by the cross of Christ.

[22:28] Later in chapter 21 we'll do this in a few weeks time Jesus will go into deeper detail concerning the destruction of the temple and his return as the Son of Man.

But it's now Jesus who brings us to the climax of the whole section. Looking directly at the people verse 17 looking directly at the people in a most serious tone he asks what then is that which is written the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?

Quoting from Psalm 118 Jesus gives to himself a new title he calls himself the cornerstone the word itself can be translated as capstone or cornerstone the head head of the stone whatever the correct translation it's an architectural term perfectly in context with where Jesus is speaking these words namely in the temple in Jerusalem the cornerstone or capstone of the temple was the most important block in the structure the one stone which set in place every other stone and gave the building its stability structure and robustness Jesus is that stone not literally of course spiritually it is Jesus who gives the temple its meaning and purpose as the meeting place between God and man Jesus is now changing the imagery you see he is comparing the religious leaders of Israel not to tenant farmers but to builders and the builders have rejected the most important block in the temple the foundation stone the cornerstone or the capstone the leaders of Israel have rejected

Jesus but what has been rejected by men has been accepted by God he has become the cornerstone of a new temple Jesus doesn't go into what this new temple will be but we know it is the church we know it is the church but the important thing for us in the context of our passage are the consequences for the religious leaders of Israel of their rejection of Jesus verse 18 everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces and when it falls on anyone it will crush them there will be no escape their attitude to Jesus the crucifixion of him will lead to their condemnation even though the wicked tenants had beaten the prophets they would have been forgiven had they accepted the son but they killed the son they rejected the cornerstone now their destiny is sealed they have condemned themselves by condemning

Jesus it's a solemn word for any church that if any church should reject the gospel of Jesus Christ in favor of its own religious code it condemns itself to the judgment of God oh we cannot possibly talk about sin these days it's not socially acceptable let's talk about a gospel of pure acceptance and love if any church should reject the gospel of Jesus Christ in favor of its own socially acceptable code it condemns itself to the judgment of God and if any person in the world ourselves included should reject Jesus Christ God's cornerstone there shall be no escape for him or her but for those who accept Jesus and receive him as God's son and our Lord we find in him a greater glory than any human structure I remember as a boy 15 years old standing looking up at the pyramids in Egypt and no picture can ever prepare you for standing beneath a pyramid it is absolutely huge and all you can do is go we find in Jesus

[26 : 50] Christ a greater glory than any human structure be it the greatest building on earth the pyramid of Cheops in Giza when we see the glory of Jesus and the glory of his love for us on the cross and his resurrection our hearts are filled with awe and our knees buckle before him in worship and praise who cares for all the temples of this world who cares for the cathedrals when we have the Lord Jesus Christ in his word standing before us today in the glory of all this majestic love the owner of the vineyard has sent his beloved son to us this morning to collect the rent of his righteousness the Lord of the temple has the cornerstone in place this morning ready for judgment what then shall be our response to this shall it be that of the religious leaders of Israel who continue to reject Jesus even though Jesus came as the son of God shall we continue to reject the beauty of the gospel today or today shall we give God back that harvest of righteousness by believing in his son

Jesus Christ for that is what he requires simple faith that's all simple faith shall we humbly put our faith in Jesus Christ the true temple of God and join with the billions of others who through the centuries have discovered that knowing Jesus is more precious than having a vault full of gold and greater than standing in the heart of the world's greatest temple temple and will be to the world's greatest temple and will be to the people who