

### God's Insane Love

- 1) Relentlessly pursues sinners
- 2) Hides treasure in the trash
- 3) Makes trash into treasure
- 4) Changes our perspective about trash and treasure

<sup>9</sup>He went on to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. <sup>10</sup>At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup>He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup>He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

<sup>13</sup>"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'

<sup>14</sup>"But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' <sup>15</sup>So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup>He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."

When the people heard this, they said, "God forbid!"

<sup>17</sup>Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written:

"The stone the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone?"

<sup>18</sup>Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."

<sup>19</sup>The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

Today's surprising strategy- *Hiding Treasure in the Trash*- is not just surprising, but one might even describe it in worse terms like naïve, misguided, or foolish. You get why of course! Treasure should go in a safe or jewelry box Trash is icky and gross and needs to be thrown out and gotten rid of. Hence, it's generally understood you would not want to put something valuable into or beside it because it would likely get thrown out or ruined. My 18 month old son Teddy was not aware of this nugget of truth when he took a freshly opened 5 pound jar of his treasured peanut butter out of the pantry, as he's prone to do, and then, as he's also prone to do, put it into the garbage, unbeknownst to his parents, and his dear old Dad took it out to the trash can, never to be seen again. At least, that's what we assume happened unless someone broke into our house and stole only a jar of peanut butter.

Now, while such a thing like putting treasure in the trash could happen to a year and a half old, it would certainly be surprising if it happened to God. And it would be even more surprising, even dare say "foolish" or "insane", if you learned that God did it on purpose. That would require some explanation.

That's the kind of explanation our parable gives us today about **God's Insane Love** and his purpose for *hiding treasure in the trash*. Now let's acquaint ourselves first with the definition of the word *insanity*, especially if we're going to dare to use it in reference to God. The first entries in Merriam Webster online dictionary have to do with insanity as a condition: "a severely disordered state of mind, an unsoundness of mind." That's not the way we're referring to God. We'll see the order of his plan

that's been fleshed out from eternity. The the second way *insanity* is defined is "extreme folly or unreasonableness, something utterly foolish." That actually is the way we're referring to God's love, but we're allowed to because God inspired his own Bible writer to use the term foolishness to talk about the whole message of the cross. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1:21 that **"God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe."**

As Jesus tells this parable, I think you'll agree, there's quite a bit of foolishness to it, especially on the part of the Owner of the Vineyard, who is representing God. A man rents his vineyard out to tenants. At harvest time, he sends a servant to collect, and the servant is beaten and sent back emptyhanded. He tries again with another servant and the same thing happens—beaten, mistreated and sent away. Now, already at this point, the owner might be thought a bit foolish for being duped twice the same way. What do we say, "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." (He should've learned the lesson and not gotten fooled again.) But now for the third time, he sends a servant to collect and that servant gets beaten, mistreated and sent away empty-handed. At this point, the owner is beginning to meet the criteria of a different definition of insanity you might be familiar with--*doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results*. The owner would be insane to keep doing what he's doing. Clearly, he needs to do something different and has every right to turn these no-good tenant squatters in to the law, especially when they had taken it out on the innocent messengers, which everyone knows isn't cool.

But what the owner does next, you might say, is pure insanity, utter foolishness. He does the same thing now for the fourth time expecting different results, and but this time he raises the stakes. This time he says, **"I will send my son, who I love; perhaps they will respect him."** (Luke 20:13). That's an awfully big "perhaps" to risk the life of your son on.

As expected, the tenants are not affected by this extremely generous show of patience and every benefit of the doubt. In fact their wickedness increases all the more when they see the heir coming. **"Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours,"** (20:14) which is a completely foolish and unfounded assumption to think that murder would enable them to take legal possession of the vineyard. But that's the kind of unsound and deranged thinking that sin causes, so **"they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him."** (20:15). So far in the parable, we've seen the insane patience of the owner met by the greedy and deranged insanity of the tenants.

Now let's stop for a moment to consider setting and audience of the parable, which is always an important thing for understanding the meaning that the storyteller, Jesus, was trying to communicate. It was the Tuesday of Holy Week and Jesus was teaching in the temple courts. On Sunday he had ridden into Jerusalem to the shouts of "Hosanna to the king!" Since then, **"the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him. Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words."** (Luke 19:47-48). And now, Jesus is telling this parable to the people in the hearing of the chief priests and leaders. Talk about having the gumption to poke the bear, it was abundantly clear to those Jewish leaders that he had spoken this parable against them.

Now all of that gives us pretty clear indication of the meaning so far. The owner of the vineyard was God. He had entered into a relationship, a covenant, and an agreement with a group of people, the Israelites or the Jews. God sent servants, the prophets to collect some of the fruit. God had sent a long line of prophets, Moses, Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah and Jeremiah, and John the Baptist and on and on, all who were mistreated, ignored, even killed. But in God's extreme patience, he kept on sending servants, doing the same thing over again to the point of insanity. **In insane love 1) He relentlessly pursued sinners to turn them back to himself**—and largely, he was still left emptyhanded.

Then God's insane love raised the stakes. **"When the set time had fully come"** (Galatians 4:4), **"God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son."** (John 3:16). The wisdom of the world would consider this to be a stroke utter foolishness, total insanity, if all the prophets before had been mistreated. Yet God gave the most beloved treasure he could, his Son whom he loves, and he placed him in a manger full of straw in Bethlehem in world chalked full of violently deranged sinners trashing the place over until Judgement Day comes. **God's insane love caused him 2) to hide his treasure in the trash.**

Now let's think again about the audience and the purpose of the parable. The parable was against the chief priests. Even at that very moment, Jesus was pursuing them, making a last-ditch effort to stop them, which would ultimately provoke them to carry out his death. But the real benefit of parable was for the crowd of people standing there and for the people sitting here. The point was to make it abundantly clear to everyone. "God has been insanely patient, giving you every chance in the world to turn away from this course. If continue down this road, there will be no excuses to make. You won't be able to blame God or pleading insanity and squirm off the hook. Jesus told them, **"What will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."** (Luke 20:16). And it will be obvious to everyone that this is justice. God's patience is not to be tried forever and those who crucify the Son all over again by their unbelief will be broken to pieces and crushed when the stone falls on them.

When the people heard the ending of the story, they shuttered to think of it. "God forbid! May it never be." It doesn't seem like they're so worried about the Son getting killed as they are the tenants getting killed and the vineyard being taken from the Jews and handed over to the Gentiles. That part they heard, but Jesus wants them to understand the part about himself. So **"Jesus looks directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written; 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'?"** (20:17)

He is trying to explain and even foretell to them God's method behind the madness of hiding treasure in the trash. In a few days, the builders were going to reject him, God's precious, treasured stone given to them, and throw it out. On Friday, the Jewish leaders, at the insistence of a mob of people yelling "Crucify him" will take him outside the city and kill him. But that stone will once again become the Cornerstone, the most important stone in the whole building, the one that's straight and true and able to bear the weight of the whole world. God will go outside the city and pick up his precious and discarded treasure and set his Cornerstone in the city of Zion and on it, the Church will rise to become a holy temple in the Lord.

After all that singeing law, Jesus is announcing the gospel of his death and resurrection. He will be put to death outside the city and God will raise him up from the trash heap of death and he will see the light of life and become the Cornerstone of the church. And **"The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."** (1 Peter 2:5)

This is how the foolishness of God works, and how he is pleased to save those who believe in his insane love. **"To you who believe, this stone is precious," and "you also like living stone are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood... You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession."** 1 Peter 2:5,7,9. Do you realize what's happening. **3) God is making trash into treasure.** You may not prefer to be called trash in the first place, but we better get over it, because it's the "God's honest truth" about what we were, and now he's turning lost and condemned creatures into his holy precious treasure, and he's doing it through faith in the righteous work of Christ the Cornerstone.

Let's do a quick recap of all that. 1) God runs after the trash blowing away. He relentlessly pursues us. 2) Then he hides his precious treasure, his own Son in the trash. And he does that in order 3) to make trash into his holy treasure, so he could live forever with both his beloved Son and his redeemed holy children. And that brings us to our final point. The insanity of God's love **4) changes our whole perspective about trash and treasure**, about what's important, what to keep and what to get rid of!

Think about Paul, who was one of the Jewish leaders after Jesus' death. He continued the streak of persecuting the church and killing the Lord's servants like Stephen, until the Lord knocked him off a donkey, changed his heart, and made him the chosen instrument to hand the vineyard over to the Gentiles. Now listen to him writing to the Philippians about all the things he used to hang his hat on. **"I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ."** (Philippians 3:9). Everything we loved and prized before becomes trash. The righteousness of Christ become our treasure, and we come to know the power of his resurrection that helps us attain to our resurrection.

As I meditated on these verses from Philippians, I couldn't help but think of my friend Quianna. She was in the Bible instruction class I taught as a seminary senior in Milwaukee. I preached on these verses from Philippians at her adult confirmation. I got to preach about the righteousness of Christ that had become theirs through faith. They professed their faith, and their children were baptized.. Her and one of the other ladies attended my graduation from the seminary like they were my own family.

Then a few years later, after I was here in Appleton, I got a phone call that Quianna, had been tragically shot and killed. It was a terrible and confusing thing that had happened, but there was really only one thing that was important at that point. She had been clothed in the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith in Christ. She had become God's treasure and now she had received the prize for which she'd been called heavenward. And the time she spent in God's word learning those truths was the most important of her life.

My friends, treasure what is truly treasure and throw away the trash! Amen.