

A Long Legacy of Rejection: True Christianity Has Never Been “Cool”

Introduction

The Text

⁹ And he began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. ¹⁰ When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹ And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. ¹² And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. ¹³ Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ ¹⁴ But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’ ¹⁵ And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶ He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “Surely not!”

¹⁷ But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written: “‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone’?”

¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.” (Luke 20:9–18)

The Issue of Rejection

A. Some of you may be surprised to see I’m still in these verses. You recall a couple of weeks ago I did already address them in a sermon.

1. But, as is pretty typical with me, in preparation last time, there was so much I saw in this text that I didn’t get speak to. Sometimes I let that slide, but other times I feel strongly it’s worth revisiting. And that’s where we are this morning.
 - a. There’s one thing in particular here that I wanted to bring our attention to. And it’s this issue of rejection. You see that’s what I’m after even in the title of today’s sermon: A Long Legacy of Rejection: True Christianity Has Never Been “Cool.”

B. You see, last time we largely looked at this text from the perspective of these tenants. And I do think that is the main thrust of the parable and image Jesus gives.

1. The punchline coming at the end is really just this: What are you going to make of Jesus? Are you going surrender to Him, build your life upon Him as cornerstone, or you going try to run things on your own, even evict Him from His own vineyard as it were, and then stumble over Him and ultimately get crushed by Him?

- C. Surely, that is the main thrust of this passage. But there is another theme here, something else worth bringing out. And it is, as I've said, this matter of rejection.
 - 1. Here now we come to view the text from the standpoint, not of these tenants, but from that of these servants of God who are sent one after the other again and again, only to be continually, categorically, violently opposed . . . and ultimately rejected by the very ones they're sent to reach.

- D. What we come to see straightaway here, then, in technicolor really, is that, if we should desire to be a servant of God—to be used by Him, to be a messenger or an ambassador for Him, to tell others about Him—we should very well anticipate that we too will be at times mocked, despised, opposed, and rejected.
 - 1. If we would follow after Jesus we must reckon with the long legacy of rejection that's been established by all those who have gone before us. True Christianity—whatever your long-bearded, skinny-jeans-wearing, craft-coffee-drinking, hipster pastor may have told you—has never been cool in the culture's eyes, and it never will be.

Setting up the Sermon with a Story

- A. Before, I put forward our path for this morning allow me to set up our conversation by sharing a brief story, albeit a humbling one—not of one of my evangelistic successes, but of one my failures and missed opportunities.

- B. I have recently gotten quite fed up with being regularly in pain and stiff and sore while working in my office. I sit too much in old chairs and old desks and have forever only worked over a little laptop, so I'm hunched like Quasimodo most of the day. I end the day all up in knots, I spend the day shifting and squirming, half efficient and things because I'm just hurting.
 - 1. And finally I was just like: "That's it. It's time for an ergonomic makeover." I never really put money into this stuff and I was finally ready to. Whatever it takes. Because I just wasn't able to do my work. I guess I'm round towards 40 and this is what starts to catch up with you.

- C. So anyways, I do my research, I talk to John Lugo—our in-house ergonomic guru—and I decide I'm going to go all out and get one of those standing desks, and I'm going to actually get a computer monitor with one of those monitor arms and things. It's going to be good. So I thought.
 - 1. I order most of this stuff from one company, and I'm telling you it's like everything that could go wrong goes wrong.

- D. To spare you the details, I'll just read you one of the many emails I had to send to the company through this process. In this one I kind of sum up what happened (bear in mind, at this point I'm starting to get a little frustrated . . . so hopefully this doesn't incriminate me!):

Okay, I really don't want to be a jerk guys, I promise I don't, but this has been ridiculous. I can tell your staff is kind and caring, so I know it's not your fault, but I've never had a harder time purchasing products and things. Here's the story . . .

I placed the order on June 1.

The order arrived on June 14. I was excited! I started putting the desk together right away. While putting it together, I soon realized one of the frame pieces was severely bent and unusable (a grommet was broken as well). I reached out immediately.

A week later I heard back. Another week later and I received the piece. The desk had been laying partially assembled face-down on the carpet in my office. When I received the piece I was again eager to get it together. I continued where I left off with the instructions. I only got a few steps further when I realized I wasn't given enough desk screws. I went to the hardware store. They didn't have the size. I reached out again to the person who helped me previously. No response. A few days later I shot up another flare, this time expressing a little frustration.

I heard back right away. The screws would be "overnighted." 4 or 5 days later they arrive. I went right back to work. I got it all put together, then went to flip the desk over. Remember, it's been laying partially assembled face down on the carpet in my office now for over three weeks. I flipped it over, and then noticed a small but significant "punch" in the main tabletop (see picture). The punch is located near the front of the desk where I would write and it looks like the laminate will soon begin to flake off around it. It's not just a scratch. I really don't want to care about this, but I suppose I'd like it to be right. I have no idea if it came like this (I didn't investigate) or if it happened while sitting for weeks on my carpet (I've searched the carpet for anything hard and couldn't find anything). Either way, it feels I wanted to see if there is anything we could do about this.

But there's more. So then, now that my desk was getting put together, I decided it was time to open the monitor arm box and figure that out. When I opened it, I kid you not, a piece of metal falls out (see picture). I was really hoping this was just incidental, but it looks like you need the piece to use it.

Guys, again, I don't want to be a jerk, but this has been quite frustrating! I've lost a sense of faith that any of these products are worth the money I spent. I went with you because of good reviews on Wirecutter and elsewhere so I know they must be legit, but my experience so far has been anything but confidence-building.

Okay, end of rant. Sorry. Please call me. Thanks!

- E. Now, in the end, they really did a good job, and I actually enjoyed chatting with the girl who was helping me.
1. And, through the course of this, she just said something like: "Nick you are not normal. You're so nice. All of my years working here, I've never seen so many things go wrong. And I've had some people get nasty with me for much, much less. I don't know what you're doing man, but keep doing it. You're just a really good human being."
- F. Now, I'm a pastor. I know what I've got here. I've got a wide open door to share with this girl about the hope that is within me. "I don't know what you got that makes you like this . . ." It's Jesus, right?!
1. "Why do I try my best to treat people with respect and dignity and kindness and patience instead of as objects and slaves . . . because of Jesus, the way He's loved me. My hope isn't in a desk or a perfect office, it's in heaven. And yours can be too."
 2. That's what I should have said. But instead I got all nervous and timid and said something like "Well, gee, thanks, I just try to do my part."

- a. What's that?! What kind of a pastor says that?! I mean, we were right there in 1 Pet 3:15: "[I]n your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you . . ." This is it. This is what we wait for. I didn't even have to push it on her. She just asked. She lobbed in a softball.
 - i. And, to my shame, I didn't even take a swing. I just watched it float on by. Why?!

G. In a word: rejection. Fear of rejection.

- 1. This company's in Portland, I could tell this girl was probably hipster cool and what not, she's cussing on the phone and things, and talking all trendy, I didn't want that awkwardness of mentioning Jesus. I didn't want to be rejected.
 - a. And we're not talking anything remotely like what these servants in the parable Jesus tells receive, right? We're not talking about getting beaten or wounded or killed. We're talking about maybe a few awkward moments, or at worst, maybe she'd hang up on me or something. But I don't want to be rejected.

"Chameleon Christians"

A. Do you have any of this? I know you do. We all do. Rejection is hard. I don't think anybody likes it.

- 1. Some of us have been marked pretty deeply by it. Maybe rejected by parents or an ex-spouse or a kid or an old pastor or church or friends or a boss. The cut's gone deep.
 - a. And so the idea of not pleasing people or being approved and accepted by them, the idea of being rejected, is almost too much to bear. We learn to be what I'd call "Chameleon Christians."
 - i. We'd say we're Christians well enough, but still we modify and edit ourselves to match our surroundings. We change who we are to accommodate those whom we are around. We don't want to displease or feel like an outsider or be anything less than appreciated and adored.

B. But Jesus in our text, in a roundabout way, is saying we better get used to this idea of rejection. The people of God—any who would follow after and stand with Him—will have to face it in one way or another.

C. So what I want to do this morning is simply try to help us with this—maybe uncover why we're often surprised by it, unprepared for it, shying away from it, and come up with some things we can do about it. And I hope we grow in our boldness and witness as result.

- 1. There are three things, in particular that I think we need to reconsider if this is to happen, all of which I'll bring out from our text. We need to: (1) Reconsider God's Call and Promise; (2) Reconsider Man's Nature and Need; and (3) Reconsider Our Own Identity and Destiny.

(1) Reconsider God's Call and Promise

- A. It seems to me that, depending on what we've been told by our pastors and church traditions and things, we may initially come to Christ with wrong expectations of how life will go from then on. Somewhere along the way we may get this idea that we come to Jesus and then after that all is just going to be smooth sailing.
1. The notion we buy into is that He did the suffering there on the cross so that I don't have to.
- B. But that's not the New Testament teaching at all. Now, certainly it is true that Jesus shelters us, and protects, and in so many ways life is more rich and sweet . . . but nowhere in there are we promised that our immediate stuff in this life will go better, at least in an external sense.
1. In fact, if Jesus promises us anything, it's that things are going to get tougher in this world, but that knowing Him, His grace, His salvation, His eternal and abundant life, will be worth it.
- C. Certainly, this is the implication of a text like the one before us. Every servant of God here, and even the beloved Son Himself, is rejected and hated on by the world.
1. I mentioned last time how these "servants" here likely represent the way God sent His prophets to Israel time and again through the years to no avail. But the broader picture is simply this: If you want to be a servant of God you will be rejected by men.
- D. Such is Christianity's long legacy of rejection.
1. We could talk about Cain persecuting Abel.
 2. Or the brothers of Joseph throwing him into a pit and leaving him for dead.
 3. Or the people of Israel turning on Moses and wanting to make an end of him though he had given his life to serve and lead them.
 4. Or the way King David was violently opposed by Saul from jealousy.
 5. Or Jeremiah who was imprisoned and later cast into the bottom of a cistern, all for warning the king of the Babylonians and calling them to turn back to YHWH.
 6. And of course then comes Jesus, who self-identifies here as "[the stone that the builders rejected](#)" ([Luke 20:17](#)), murdered on a cross by the very people He came to save.
 7. And it doesn't stop there with Him does it? For a few weeks later, persecution arose in Jerusalem and Stephen is stoned, others are hunted down.
 8. Nearly every apostle it would seem at least from tradition, killed. The founders of our faith—rejected and murdered.
 - a. We know for sure Peter would be killed, Jesus said so himself in [John 21:18-19](#).
 - b. James, we're told, was killed by Herod "[with the sword](#)" ([Acts 12:2](#)).

- c. Paul, Jesus appears to him on the road to Damascus and, you remember, He sends Ananias to him after the fact with the explicit purpose of “[showing] him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name” (Acts 9:16).
 - d. John is the only one supposed to have made it to old age and natural death, but this was only because God had miraculously preserved him through many persecutions and even island exile.
- E. But, for as crazy and hard as this all sounds, none of it should have come as a surprise to them or us.
- 1. For Jesus has made it abundantly plain elsewhere: “A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). We ought to expect the same sort of red carpet treatment that Jesus got, right?
 - 2. Or later: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).
 - a. Again, clear as day: Jesus did not suffer so I don’t have to. He suffers in love for me, so I can suffer in love for others . . . by the power of His Spirit. That’s the biblical logic. And it’s this that we must square with if we are to be His servants.
- F. This is why He begins His call to discipleship, not: “Come and I will make your life nice and tidy”; but: “Come, take up your cross, and follow Me.”
- 1. It will be hard, marked by great loss and rejection in many ways, but you will have Me, and that will be more than enough.
- G. So a closer look at the call and promises of God helps us to realize, there’s going to be rejection, it’s going to be hard, you may lose some relationships, you may lose some street cred, you may lose a job . . . but it’s also going to be amazing, and the adventure of a lifetime . . . of an eternity really.

(2) Reconsider Man’s Nature and Need

- A. I think part of the reason we are sometimes surprised and unprepared when we face rejection as Christians is we downplay the nature of fallen man.
- 1. I think it’s actually a part of our fallen nature to deny the extent and full scope of it. In other words, we don’t like to think that human beings are that bad. We need a little boost from Jesus, perhaps, but I don’t think we fully appreciate how deep our depravity goes.
- B. To give you an example, I heard in the news as many of you did as well I’m sure about the fireman who, while he was out fighting fires and saving people, had his vehicle broken into, his wallet stolen, and his bank account drained.
- 1. He’s saving you and you’re stealing from him. It’s insane. And many rightly called out whoever did this as the monster that he/she is.
 - a. CAL FIRE operations chief Mark Brunton said: "It's saddening. It's sickening. We are doing everything we can to try to help the community and . . . [then] this happens."

- b. Santa Cruz County Sheriff Jim Hart responded in a press conference by saying: “To me, it’s just mind-boggling that somebody would have the audacity to do something like that.”
 - c. The official twitter account for CAL FIRE CZU put out a tweet that read: “Really? REALLY!?? While a Fire Ground Commander was battling flames, someone stole his wallet from his work truck & DRAINED HIS BANK ACCOUNT! UNCONSCIONABLE!”
- C. Now, my point here is not to say that these people are wrong in their estimation. They are right. This sort of behavior is outright disgusting.
 - 1. But if you notice we talk about these things as if only those out there, those animals, that rare breed of wretched people, would do such a thing.
 - 2. For us, the more civilized and upright and moral, the idea is to take the sheriff’s word again: “mind-boggling.” In other words: “I can’t begin to fathom ever doing something like this myself, the very thought of it boggles my mind.”
- D. But here’s my point: Whether we like to admit it or not, it’s in us all. By nature.
 - 1. What is our parable, and the gospel, about? Jesus, the beloved Son of God, comes to save us—to fight fire, if you will—and how do we respond? We steal from Him and kill Him.
 - a. In the parable, these tenants are trying to get their hands on the Son’s vineyard. “It’s mine!”
 - b. Around the cross, we read of men casting lots for His garments. “Get His stuff!”
 - c. And you and I have done the same. God is on a mission to save, and we steal from Him. “I don’t want Jesus, but I’ll take His stuff!”
- E. So it’s in us. And it’s in the people that we’re trying to bring the gospel to. We like to think that we can appeal to a common human decency and rationality and people will get the gospel and receive Jesus.
 - 1. But this parable says God keeps appealing and appealing and these people only double down on their resistance and rejection.
 - a. As Paul says in Rom 8:7: “[T]he mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot.”
 - b. Or later in 1 Cor 2:14: “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”
 - c. Jesus Himself would say earlier to Nicodemus: “[U]nless one is born again [from above] he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).
 - i. People’s eyes are too blind, minds too darkened, hearts too hard. They’re not going to get it or want it unless the Spirit of God from above moves on them in saving power.

- F. What this means is that when you receive Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life you are putting yourself fundamentally at odds with the will and way of this world. You will not fit. You will cut against the grain. Your life and message will be like fingernails being dragged down a chalkboard. You will not be acceptable.
1. As James says: “[F]riendship with the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4). And by extension, friendship with God is enmity with the world. It’s a clash of kingdoms. Therefore, you will be seen as something strange and hostile.
 - a. Here is the reason for the great opposition and rejection. We go about talking about the gospel and the possibility of abundant and eternal life in Jesus, but all those in the flesh here us talking about is death. Death to this or that desire. Giving up of control.
- G. Is it any wonder, then, that when we share what we call the “good news of Jesus Christ” so many reject it as bad?! We should anticipate such rejection but we must not acquiesce to it. God is still moving, God is still regenerating, God is still saving.
1. So we preach and we pray and we let the persecution come, as God wills.

(3) Reconsider Our Own Identity and Destiny

- A. Sometimes we can find our identity in other people’s acceptance of us. We find our worth and our security there.
1. When people accept us, we feel on top of the world. But when they turn on us, or reject us, or speak bad of us behind our backs—when they don’t like us . . . we’re devastated.
- B. Now there are a number of ways this can play out in our hearts.
1. Sometimes we mistake the acceptance of people for the acceptance of God. We think that if everyone approves of us it’s a sign that God is approving us. We can feel like if people aren’t happy with us, God must not be happy with us either. So we can mistake the acceptance of man for the acceptance of God.
 2. But other times it’s not so innocent. Other times we don’t mistake the one for the other, we trade for it. We know we’re doing things God isn’t pleased with, but we’re willing to do it to get the approval of people.
 - a. This is the girl who sleeps with the dude because he’s going to leave her if she doesn’t.
 - b. This is the guy who cuts corners to pad his numbers at work to get pats on the back from his boss.
 - c. This is me too scared to say to the customer support lady on the phone: “Jesus is the reason I’m different. And I want you know Him too!”

- i. We're trading in those moments, the acceptance of God for the acceptance of man. We're misplacing our identity—finding it in what people say about us rather than what God has said.

(1) We're forgetting who we truly are in Jesus and exposing the fact that we've hardly yet experienced the exhilarating joy of being freely, fully, and forever accepted by God in Christ.

C. Our witness problems are fundamentally worship problems.

- 1. If we are floundering in our witness, what we need is not better training or new techniques, we need to worship, we need to preach the gospel to our soul until we really get it, until we are hot with affection and overcome with adoration.

- a. The deepest worshipers make the best evangelists. Evangelism isn't so much about tactics and boldness as much as it is about being authentically amazed at the grace of God for you in Jesus.

- i. When you really get that you are accepted by God in Christ, when you get all that that means for you, you won't care nearly so much when people reject you. It won't control you or devastate you when they think you're a fool because you know you are loved so wonderfully and completely by God.

D. In our text, this is how Jesus is able to stand firm in the face of all the rejection He knows is coming. Did you catch it? He hints at this when He refers to Himself in the parable there as the “beloved son” (v. 13).

- 1. That's important. That's really important. It's the love of the Father for Him that got Him through all the junk He'd have to endure for us.
 - a. That's why God declares His love over His Son, if you remember, first at His baptism, right before the temptation in the wilderness;
 - b. And then again on the mount of transfiguration, right before Jesus sets His face for Jerusalem and heads to the cross.
 - i. How is Jesus going to get through this suffering and rejection? Drinking deeply in the Father's love. Knowing His identity as a beloved Son.

E. And you've got to know that as well. If you're not in Christ, come to Him this morning, repent and receive Him, and the Bible says you too will be adopted as God's child in Him. You enter into that same experience of God's love and acceptance, that same sense of identity.

F. Art Martinez reminded me of a place in J.I. Packer's famous book *Knowing God* where he talks about the sort of acceptance that is ours in Jesus:

“There is unspeakable comfort—the sort of comfort that energizes, be it said, not enervates—in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me for my

good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that his love to me is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion him about me, in the way I am so often disillusioned about myself, and quench his determination to bless me.

There is, certainly, great cause for humility in the thought that he sees all the twisted things about me that my fellow humans do not see (and am I glad!), and that he sees more corruption in me than that which I see in myself (which, in all conscience, is enough). There is, however, equally great incentive to worship and love God in the thought that, for some unfathomable reason, he wants me as his friend, and desires to be my friend, and has given his Son to die for me in order to realize this purpose" (p. 42).

- G. Isn't that amazing? I think I've heard Tim Keller say something like: "God knows us to the bottom and loves us to the sky." He knows you through and through, at your worst, and yet still He loves and accepts you fully.
1. It's the exact opposite of what we experience with other people. We try so hard to cover and hide and put forward our best and be something they want . . . and they still reject us in the end.
 2. Jesus, on the other hand, sees all the stuff we wish we could hide . . . and yet He still loves us and accepts us.
 - a. That's transformative. That's "energizing." If you really believe that, you can't be touched. You will speak for Christ and not worry about what everyone else is thinking.
- H. Lastly, I mention the idea not just of our identity here but of our destiny as well. Obviously, the two are related, but I wanted to give this a moment's airtime.
1. In our text, Jesus knows he's a beloved son of God and, because of this, He knows it's going to end well. Will it be hard? Yes. Will He be rejected by men? Yes. But will God flip all that for good in the end? Yes.
 - a. "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" (v. 17). You are rejecting me, stumbling over me, but God accepts me and is going to build something from this.
- I. That's how we get through. We know He's up to something. We can stand with Jesus and speak up even when it's not cool.