

October 4, 2026 – Pentecost 22

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Matthew 21:33–43

“His Patience!”

What word best describes this landowner?

As Jesus tells it, this landowner owns some land -- say, a dozen acres -- and he has decided to produce grapes on his land. He chooses the varieties of grapes he wants to grow. In the garden next to his house, he pulls out the weeds, rakes up the soil, fertilizes it, pushes his seeds into the dirt, waters it, watches, and waits. But he does more than that. He and his servants go out on his 12 acres week after week and month after month. With shovels in hand, they build long earthen mounds so the rainfall can moisten his vines without flooding them. They construct wooden trellises that run along these mounds so someday the vines can climb them. In every sort of weather, they put in hard, back-breaking work. Speaking of vines, every day he also checks on the garden around his house, and he's glad when he notices seedlings that seem to grow a little each day. When the seedlings are each about this long (12"-18"), he and his servants dig them up, put them in burlap bags, and wheel them out to his 12 acres. They carefully plant the seedlings about 8 feet apart in long row after long row. Then for four entire years he and his servants fertilize the vines and do their best to guard them from insects and other pests.

What word best describes this landowner?

Before the first harvest comes in, the landowner and his servants have much more to prepare. They construct stone walls around his vineyard to keep wild animals away from his precious vines. They assemble a tower, and they post someone up in that tower to watch for thieves who might steal his precious crop. The landowner digs a winepress. What an undertaking that is! He has to find rock-hard earth. Then with pick axe and shovel, he carves out a 10-foot x 10-foot basin maybe 2 feet deep. Then a second basin in the rock-hard earth but lower than the first one, perhaps this big around (3 feet) and also 2 feet deep. Then carve a channel between the two. The idea being this: The harvested grapes will be dumped into the larger basin. The landowner and his servants then trample the grapes with their feet till the juice from the grapes flows down from the larger basin into the smaller, where it's then scooped up into jars and filtered into bottles and stored until it ferments; till he finally can taste and sell his precious fruit of the vine.

What word best describes this landowner? Hard-working. Tenacious. Tireless. Determined. How about this word: persistent? Or how about this word: patient?

As Jesus tells his story, this particular landowner does all that I just described. Then he goes way beyond the usual standard. For reasons we're not told, he has to move to another land. Aging parents need him, or troubled children, or some other matter of family or business. The landowner can no longer run his vineyard himself, so he rents his 12 acres out to what we'd call tenant farmers. When the vines in the vineyard have matured and the grapes are heavy on the vines, these tenant farmers bring in the harvest. As compensation, they'll get a generous portion of the grapes for themselves. But the landowner -- the one who's done nearly all of the work himself -- he would like some of the fruits of his labors also for himself and his family and his servants. He sends three servants to the tenant farmers, who do violence to his servants. They beat one till he's black and blue and bleeding. Later on, they kill one of them. Later on, they pelt the third servant with stones till he flees for his life.

The landowner receives his report of this, but he's a patient man. He sends other servants to these tenant farmers. This time it's six or eight or ten servants. They ask for the landowner's rightful share of the harvest, but the tenant farmers **"treat them the same way"** -- beating them or killing them or pelting them with stones. Then the landowner's patience goes beyond what any human being would ever possibly even consider. He realizes he has one person left to send. He has a son, his only son, whom he dearly loves. So **"last of all, he sends his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he says. But when the tenants see the son, they say to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' So they take him and throw him out of the vineyard and kill him."**

When Jesus first told this story, undoubtedly his 12 disciples were listening. Certainly other men and women who admired him were gathered round. But mostly, Jesus was directing his story to those who up to this point brazenly refused to give God the fruits God asked for. You see, God had been like this landowner ... planning and working, working and planning, watching, waiting. When everything was all ready and the time was right, God gave the leaders of his chosen people the opportunity **"to harvest the fruit and give him his share"** -- in other words, to give him their love in response to his love; to show him their kindness in response to his kindness; to come before him in humility, to honor him above all, to respect him. But they refused to give him that fruit. He sent his servants to them -- prophets like Elijah and Elisha and Micah. His prophets asked God's people for the fruits of sincere repentance of their sins. But they beat God's prophets; they killed some of them; chased some of them away with stones. He sent more servants to them -- more prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Zechariah and Malachi and John the Baptist. More prophets served God boldly and asked God's people for the fruits of faith. But they treated them the same way.

And now, as Jesus tells the story, now God the landowner has sent the only Person he has left to send. He has sent his Son, his only Son, whom he dearly loves. Will they respect God's Son? Will they give God's Son the fruits of love, of kindness, of honor, of worship, of sincere repentance and faith? The evidence is proving otherwise. The tenant farmers, so to speak -- the leading priests of Israel; the Pharisees who taught them the Scriptures; the elders of their synagogues -- no good fruits from

them. In fact, weeks earlier they had met in secret session, and they had decided to look for an opportunity to kill God's only Son.

As Jesus is telling them this story, Jesus knows about their conspiracy. So now he is confronting them for that brazen act of arrogance. He tells his story with God as the landowner and with the prophets as the landowner's servants and with the leading priests and the Pharisees and the elders of his people as the tenant farmers who have refused to give God the fruit that he deserves to have and were making ready to kill God's Son. He asks them, **"When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those (wicked) tenants?"** They answer, and with their own words condemn themselves. **"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they reply, 'and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.'"**

By one count, Jesus told at least 46 parables. That's 46 stories or illustrations that compel us to think about how God operates among us. If those 46 parables are put in the order in which Jesus told them, come to find out, he told 13 during this final week of his earthly life. And of those final 13, ten are stern "parables of judgment." They warn those who have turned against Jesus to repent, to believe in him, and to humbly serve. They warn those who are conspiring to kill God's Son; his only Son; the Son whom he loves ... They warn them: Give God the fruits that he deserves before he brings you wretched unbelievers to a wretched end.

Jesus' stern parables of judgment help all of us realize that our heavenly Father seriously wants everyone to repent and to come to the knowledge of his Son and their only Savior. Jesus' stern parables of judgment help all of us realize that our heavenly Father wants everyone to give him the fruit of love, kindness, humility, honesty, and honor. That's what you and I and many people see in this particular parable. But what you and I must not miss is how hard-working God is. How tenacious. How tireless and determined God is. What you and I must not miss is how persistent God is. And ... don't ever, ever miss this ... how incredibly patient God is!

- Long ago God promised a man named Abraham a son, a nation, and the Offspring of Abraham through whom all nations would be blessed. Abraham believes. Abraham wavers. God repeats the promise. Abraham believes. Abraham wanders. But God doesn't give up. He patiently repeats the promise several times over 25 years and makes it more and more clear until he blesses Abraham with a son.
- God promised David that a descendant of David would rule over God's kingdom forever. David believes. David wavers. God strengthens him. David believes and praises God's name in beautiful psalms. David wanders into adultery and murder. But God doesn't give up. He patiently rescues David, and he repeats the promise about the Son of David who will rule with justice and righteousness forever.
- God's Son gathers apostles and prepares to send them out and gather in his church. As a group, they're described as slow to believe. They argue with one another over which of them is the greatest. One of them denies that he knows who Jesus is. The rest of them, given a chance to defend him, desert him and flee. But God doesn't give up on them. He patiently rescues them and reassures them of forgiveness and devotes more time to them till he sends them out to be his witnesses to the world.

What's your favorite story of the persistent of God? What's your favorite parable that illustrates God's patience? Might that favorite story not be about you?

- I can't tell you how often I have failed to give thanks to God for blessings he gives me every day. Have you too failed to give God that fruit of genuine gratitude? Yet God is so patient, he doesn't give up on me, and he certainly doesn't give up on you. Today will be another day, in fact, for you to give thanks to God for all his blessings.
- I can't tell you how often I've given in to unnecessary doubts and fears and worries. Have you too failed respect God in that way? Yet God is so patient, he doesn't give up on me, and he certainly doesn't give up on you. Today will be another day, in fact, for you to turn to him with true faith and courage that relies on his power and his goodness.
- I can't tell you how often I've acted selfishly, spoken words that were only half true, harbored thoughts about others that were unkind and unforgiving. Have you too been guilty of all that and then some? Yet God is so patient, he doesn't give up on me, and he certainly doesn't give up on you. Today will be another day, in fact, for your repentance and God's forgiveness. Yes, today will be another day for you and me to give God the fruits of willing service and of truth and of thoughts and attitudes that honor our Savior.

God is so incredibly patient, he sent his Son knowing that nearly all of his own people would not welcome him. He sent his Son to be rejected by his people's leaders and to be killed on a cross. But he never gave up on his own people. After Jesus rose, God's patience paid off. In that very city, thousands of those who once wanted him killed were brought to faith and were baptized and then moved to carry his saving name into the world. You too can build your faith on your persistent heavenly Father. You too can rest your faith on that patient Lord and Savior.

"Have you never read in the Scriptures?" (Jesus asked.) "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes." That's that ancient and well-known song of faith called Psalm 118. The significance of that ancient message is obvious: The very Lord Jesus who most of them rejected has become the Cornerstone in the foundation of the Holy Christian Church throughout the world. On him and his grace God builds our hopes. On him and his love God builds our confidence. On him and his incredible patience and persistence, God builds our security and our eternity. On Christ the Cornerstone God builds all his believers into his holy temple, and, truly, **"it is marvelous in our eyes."** Amen.