

"What Will He Do?"

Text: Matthew 21:33-44

2 John 1:2-3 *"Because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever: ³ Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love."*
Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, human beings spend an inordinate amount of time wondering what someone else will do. Generals wonder what opposing generals will do. Players wonder what opposing players will do. Husbands and wives, wonder what the other will do when they hear the not-so-good news. They look for "the right time" to break it to their spouse. *"Did you like the supper, honey? I know it's your favorite. Um, about the car..."* I'm not sure if there is a special class that wives take in this, or if they just instinctively know to hang the new dress in the closet for a week or two before wearing it. Then, when they finally do and their husbands ask if it's new, answer with, *"Oh this? I've had it for a while. Is this the first time you've noticed it?"* Husbands have the advantage of never wearing tools and guns.

Young and old ask the question. Children wonder what mom and dad will do when they see the less than exemplary report card. Employees wonder why the boss suddenly called them into the office. Motorists wonder what the trooper they just passed in the median will do given the fact that they were driving 9 miles over the posted speed limit.

The reality is that most often we have no idea what another human being will do in any given situation. On the other hand, we need have no uncertainty with our God. God is not governed by human emotions. He's neither fickle nor volatile. He operates always and only with perfect wisdom, justice, and love. While not always the case with human beings, our God is entirely predictable. So it is that when Jesus asked the question in our text (*"What will he do?"*) the answer was obvious even to unbelievers.

This is the aspect of our God we will examine this morning – his utter predictability. The text that will guide us in our meditation is found in the 21st Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew:

ESV Matthew 21:33-44 *"Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went*

into another country. ³⁴ When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. ³⁵ And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' ³⁹ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹ They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." ⁴² ¶ Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'? ⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. ⁴⁴ And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

This is God's Word. That our God would richly bless us through the study of his Word this morning, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

The opening verses of our text are obviously a parable. A parable is a human story that teaches a divine lesson or truth. It also bears repeating that parables were intended to teach *one central truth*. That means we are supposed to discover and learn that one truth and to resist the temptation to make doctrine from the other elements in the parable. Parables also taught that one central truth in such a way that, although memorable, the one who spoke the parable could not be condemned for what he taught.

In our text, for example, the unbelieving Jews knew that Jesus was talking about them. In the verse following our text we read: **"When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them."** Only Jesus didn't mention the Jews, did he? He told a story. It was the Jewish leaders themselves who filled in their own names – who recognized their own place in the parable. In Titus 3, Paul used the phrase **"self-condemned."** The Jews were the ones who had killed God's prophets down through the ages. They were the ones who would one day kill **"the heir"** – which of course was Jesus himself. But, again, Jesus never said as much. His

words simply gave them the means to condemn themselves, which they did, but they hated him for it.

Don't miss the utter mastery the Savior demonstrated in the exchange between himself and his Jewish adversaries. Not only did he protect himself by communicating with a parable, he asked them a question with a painfully obvious answer, a question they had no choice but to answer honestly, even though they must have recognized that they were condemning themselves by doing so. Subjects who treated their master or lord with such disobedience and disrespect would of course know to expect swift and sure punishment. By cleverly paralleling workers disrespecting their master with sinners disrespecting their God, Jesus left his enemies with no choice but to condemn themselves. In so doing he forced them to answer the real question: *"What will God do with those who treat him as you have?"*

But God's Word is never intended just to tell stories about others. Jesus also wants each of us here today to find our role in this parable. Where then do you and I fit in? Where do we find ourselves? We are those who have inherited the "vineyard" after the original workers were condemned and cast out. That includes every single human being who believes that Jesus Christ supplied the sum total of all righteousness necessary to pay in full the entire world's sin debt. We are, therefore, those that are supposed to produce fruit.

There is also therefore pure law here that our sinful flesh needs to hear. Just as the Jews who rejected Jesus had no reason to wonder what God would do to them on the Day of Judgment, neither do those who believe for a time, only to fall away. In John 15:5-6 this same Jesus left no doubt as to what God would do to all who, though once Christian, turn away and die in unbelief: ***"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned."*** Note the word translated here as ***"abide."*** It can also be translated "remain" and addresses those who are Christians, warning us of the terrible power we have to turn away and reject – to cut ourselves off. In fact these words from Jesus make absolutely no sense if Christians can never fall away. It speaks to those who at one time were connected through faith to Jesus (the ***"vine"***) but who did not "abide" or "remain." Rather they cut themselves off through rejection and unbelief. They too need have no doubt as to what the righteous Judge will do to them when he returns.

These words from our Savior are not designed to create terror and uncertainty but sobriety and caution. Again, how nonsensical for Peter to warn us that our great adversary ***"prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"*** unless it represents a real and present danger to our eternal souls. Why would he warn Christians if we did not possess the ability, like Hymenaeus and Philetus, ***"to make shipwreck of our faith"*** (1 Timothy 1:20) and to ***"swerve from the truth"*** (2 Timothy 2:17-18).

We do indeed have a God who is utterly predictable, but that works both ways. Just as we needn't wonder what God will do to every unbeliever that stands before him on Judgment Day, so also we needn't wonder what he will do for every Christian that remains connected to him through regular use of his Word: ***"Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. ²⁵ And this is the promise that he made to us-- eternal life."***^{ESV}(1 John 2:24-25)

This is how and why Jesus' warning about being separated from him is not intended to create terror or uncertainty but sobriety and caution. The danger is real, but our Savior provided us with the means whereby he averts the calamity of which you and I are capable. Don't misunderstand here. We cannot preserve ourselves in the faith any more than we can light up a lightbulb. Just as we can, however, avail ourselves of the power to light up a lightbulb by plugging a cord into a socket, so too we can avail ourselves of God's power of preservation by immersing ourselves in his Word. Conversely, just as no one can expect a disconnected bulb to produce light, so too can no human being expect God's power to work in and through us when we disconnect ourselves from his Word.

But there is another element in our text that speaks to God's consistency and predictability: Jesus as cornerstone. Ancient builders knew that a building was only as good as its cornerstone. Why? Because in ancient construction the cornerstone set the lines and angles for the entire building. That means that if the cornerstone was not perfectly square on every single one of its sides and angles, everything that would come after would be off. Everything was based on that one cornerstone. It's no wonder that ancient builders were obsessive about their cornerstones. Great buildings could only come from perfect cornerstones.

God's lines have been set on the basis of Jesus Christ – the cornerstone. Those lines are absolutely sure, certain, and right. They are precise and therefore unquestionably predictable. There is, and never will be, any variation or compromise, which means that all guesswork or uncertainty is eliminated. ^{ESV}(Acts 17:31) **“God...has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed”** and to remove any doubt as to who that “man” is, the Holy Spirit through Paul continues, **“and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”**

What does this mean, right here and now, for each of us? It means that no matter how man seeks to twist and distort morality, God's declaration of right and wrong has not and will not change. What God declared to be wrong several thousand years ago is still wrong today, and always will be. What God has declared to be true and right is still true and right. God is the only one who can rightly determine what is straight and what is crooked. Man's opinions, wisdom, knowledge and experience do not equip him to make such determinations.

It means that every salvation plan that excludes Jesus Christ is false, leading always and only to eternal destruction in hell.

Yet it also means that we never need wonder what God will do in any given situation. It means that when you lay your requests at the foot of his throne through your prayers, he will not only always hear you, he will *always* answer. His answer might be yes, no, or not now, but he will always answer according to his perfect wisdom and love.

It means that when in humble repentance you lay your sins at the foot of Jesus' cross, he will always and only assure you that the debt of your sins has already been paid by his Son. He has both forgiven them and forgotten them. He no longer sees you as a miserable failure but as his perfect, holy, sinless child – as one with whom he wants to share heaven for all eternity.

Return *daily* therefore to that Chief Cornerstone and there have the lines of your faith and life either redrawn or reconfirmed. "Christ as Cornerstone" means that you and I need to examine our walk moment by moment on the basis of God's truth – which is the only sure, certain way to know that we haven't wandered from the lines he has indelibly drawn for us. This is what it means when we say with Joshua: **"As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!"** Then we never need wonder what our God will do.

In our New Testament reading, Paul communicated to us the core of our Christian faith: **"...not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith."** Again, we need have no doubt what God will do when he finds such faith in our hearts when he declares an end to our time on earth. He will make the end of our earthly walk the beginning of our eternal existence in his presence. Amen.

^{ESV} **Isaiah 5:1-7** Let me sing for my beloved my love song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. ² He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. ³ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. ⁴ What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? When I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? ⁵ And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. ⁶ I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and briars and thorns shall grow up; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. ⁷ For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry!

^{ESV} **Philippians 3:4b-14** If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-- ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. ¹² ¶ Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

^{ESV} **Matthew 21:33-44** "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. ³⁴ When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. ³⁵ And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. ³⁶ Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. ³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' ³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' ³⁹ And they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. ⁴⁰ When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" ⁴¹ They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons." ⁴² ¶ Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?" ⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. ⁴⁴ And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."



ST PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

The 18th Sunday after Pentecost – October 8, 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 24 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord of My Life, Whose Tender Care"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Isaiah 5:1-7) In our first lesson, God, through the Prophet Isaiah, compares Israel to a carefully constructed vineyard that inexplicably produced "bad fruit." Israel had every advantage, and yet they turned from their God and were cast out. The same warning could and should be sounded in our own streets today, for what nation or people has ever been blessed like ours? What, however, have we done with that blessing?

Psalm 118 (Supplement page 29) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Philippians 3:4b-14) In our second reading, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that the kingdom belongs only to those who believe in Jesus Christ. Paul had once been "a Jew's Jew" – trusting in his own works for his salvation. He learned that this was not God's way. The kingdom was taken from Paul's people because they rejected Jesus Christ. That kingdom has now been given to us, but it will remain ours only through faith in Jesus. Our calling, while we wait for Christ to return, is to thank him by walking in the lines God himself has drawn for our lives.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 758 (Brown Hymnal)

"Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 21:33-44 (Printed on the back page)

"What Will He Do?"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 465 (Stanzas 1&4) (Red Hymnal)

"Christ Is Our Cornerstone"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 53 (Stanzas 1-2, 6) (Red Hymnal)

"Abide, O Dearest Jesus"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here!
To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (45) Average (43)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-6:00 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Bible Study
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
	-11:30 a.m.	– Meyer baby shower and WF meeting

CLC News – Pastor Neal Radichel is considering the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Calvary of Marquette has called Pastor Terrel Kesterson.

Immanuel Lutheran College Visitors' Day – is scheduled for Friday, November 10th on the ILC campus in Eau Claire. Speak with your pastor if you're interested in attending. For questions, contact Academic Dean Paul Naumann. Office: 715-836-6636, cell: 253-228-8736, e-mail: paul.naumann@ilc.edu

Baby Shower – A baby shower is planned for Hope Meyer for next Sunday, October 15th. Please see the invitation on the serving table in the church kitchen. The baby shower will be followed by a Women's Fellowship meeting. See Cindy Ollenburger with any Women's Fellowship questions.

Christmas Flowers – Our annual order for Christmas flowers is coming due. Please consult the sign-up sheet on the mailbox table, or address any questions to Sandy Roehl.