

Luke 20:9-19
June 28, 2020

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Whether you've been a landlord or not, I bet most of us have been tenants in a property we didn't own at some point in our life. It could be a dorm at college, or an apartment you rented, or whatever. And you can easily imagine having a rental and being a landlord. So let's do a fill-in-the-blank: You know you have bad tenants when ____X____." [Let people engage]

Q: When tenants are bad, what recourse do you have as the owner of the property? [Let people engage]

Transition: We are going to read a parable in which the owner tries to collect what is due him from his vineyard, and it's not going well. The tenants do not respect the owner, and the owner will decide how he wants to deal with the tenants. Let's read the text and then make sure we are clear on who Jesus is referencing before we start to process it. Let's begin.

BOOK:

The Parable of the Tenants

⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. ¹² He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

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

¹⁴ "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.' ¹⁵ So 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 kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."

When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!"

¹⁷ 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 capstone'?"

¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." ¹⁹ 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.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Jesus told this parable for two main reasons. He wanted to encourage His faithful servants who get beat up and thrown out of the vineyard to keep on being faithful. He owns the vineyard and the main thing is for His servants to bear fruit for Him. Second, He told it to warn those who wrongly think that they own the vineyard that they do not. A day of reckoning is coming!

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, p. 257). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Their present rebellion (vv. 9–16). These men knew the Scriptures and recognized that Jesus was speaking about the “vineyard” of Israel (Ps. 80:8ff; Isa. 5:1–7). God the Father blessed the nation abundantly and gave the Jews a land that was rich and pleasant. All He asked was that they obey His statutes and give Him the “spiritual harvest” He deserved.

Instead of being grateful for their blessings and joyfully giving the Lord His due, the nation proceeded to rob God and reject His messengers (see Neh. 9:26; Jer. 7:25–26; 25:4). God was patient and sent them one servant after another, but they refused to obey (Matt. 23:29–39). Finally, He sent His beloved Son (Luke 3:22) and they killed Him. In this story, Jesus gave His own death announcement.

Under Jewish law, any man could lay claim to ownerless property. The tenants may have concluded that the owner was dead; otherwise he would have come himself. If they killed the son, then they could claim the vineyard for themselves. *This is exactly the way the religious leaders were thinking as they stood there before Jesus!* (see John 11:47–54)

Their future ruin (vv. 17–18). Jesus fixed a steady gaze on them and quoted Psalm 118:22. The rulers knew that this was a messianic psalm, and they had heard it shouted by the crowd when Jesus rode into the city (compare Luke 19:38 with Ps. 118:26). By applying this verse to Himself, Jesus was clearly claiming to be the Messiah. The “builders,” of course, were the Jewish religious leaders (Acts 4:11).

In the Old Testament, the “stone” is a familiar symbol of God and of the promised Messiah (see Gen. 49:24; Ex. 17:6; 33:22; Deut. 32:4, 15, 30–31; Isa. 8:14; 28:16; 1 Cor. 10:4). Because the Jews did not believe, they stumbled over Him and were judged. Those who trust Jesus Christ find Him to be the foundation stone and the chief cornerstone of the church (1 Cor. 3:11; Eph. 2:20).

But Jesus also referred to Daniel 2:34–35, 44–45, where the Messiah is pictured as a “smiting stone” that crushes all that gets in its way. He was warning the Sanhedrin that they would only destroy themselves if they condemned Him. The same principle applies today, and unbelievers should carefully heed His warning.

When the rulers rejected John the Baptist, they sinned against the Father who sent Him. When they crucified Jesus, they sinned against the Son. Jesus had told them that they could sin against Him and still be forgiven, but when they sinned against the Holy Spirit, there could be no forgiveness (Matt. 12:24–37). Why? *Because that was the end of God's witness to the nation.* This is the so-called “unpardonable sin,” and it was committed by the Jewish leaders when they finally rejected the witness of the Spirit of God through the Apostles. The evidence of their rejection was the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:51–60). Then the Gospel went from the Jews to the Samaritans (Acts 8) and then to the Gentiles (Acts 10).

In this parable, Jesus illustrated the insidious nature of sin: *the more we sin, the worse it becomes.* The tenants started off beating some of the servants and wounding others, but they ended up becoming murderers! The Jewish leaders *permitted* John the Baptist to be killed, they *asked* for Jesus to be crucified, and then *they themselves stoned Stephen.* They sinned against the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and that was the end of God's witness to them.

It is a serious thing to reject the message of God and the messengers of God (see John 12:35–43; Heb. 2:1–4).

Martin, J. A. (1985). Isaiah. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 255)

20:9–19 (Matt. 21:33–46. Mark 12:1–12). Jesus then told a **parable** to describe His authority. A parable about a vine was not new for Israelites. Isaiah had used the figure to refer to the nation (Isa. 5:1–7), and the symbolism would have been clear to the hearers. The owner of a **vineyard** sent three servants to gain **fruit** from his **vineyard** (Luke 20:10–12). But the tenant **farmers ... beat** each of the three. Finally, he sent his **son**, whom they **killed** so that they could gain **the inheritance** (vv. 13–15). Jesus then asked his listeners a rhetorical question, **What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?** He answered His own question—**He would kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others** (v. 16).

This culminated all of Jesus' messages concerning the fact that Gentiles and outcasts would be added to the kingdom whereas many from Israel would not be allowed to enter. The crowd responded with a strong statement of negation—**May this never be!** (*mē genoito*; used several times by Paul in Rom.) They understood the implications of what Jesus was saying: **the Jewish system was being set aside because the religious leaders were rejecting Him.** Luke pointed out the seriousness of the situation by recording that **Jesus looked directly at them** and quoted from Psalm 118:22, a verse which noted that a seemingly insignificant thing (a **stone** thrown away by stone masons) was really the most important thing (this stone became **the capstone**).

Jesus' point was that He, the most important element in the Jewish nation, was being rejected, but ultimately would be supreme. He also would be the means of judgment (Luke 20:18). The severity of Jesus' words struck home. **The teachers of the Law and the chief priests wanted to kill Him because they knew He had spoken this parable against them. But again, they feared to take any action because of the people** (cf. 19:47–48; 22:2).

Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (pp. 1492-1493). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

12:6 The authenticity of this parable is established, among other things, on the word play in Hebrew of “son” (*ben*) and “stone” (*eben*). It indicates that Jesus understood Himself to be Israel's Messiah and shows that He viewed rejection as essential to the Messiah's mission. The Jewish audience was quite able to follow Jesus' point. They understood that He was referring to Israel as the vineyard (Is 5:1) and to the prophets as the servants of the owner, God. Thus they could be expected to recognize the son as the Messiah (2 Sm 7:14; Ps 2:7; 89:26–27; cp. Mk 14:61). What they could not accept was that the Messiah would be rejected and killed by the Jewish leadership, who would in turn be destroyed.

Butler, T. C. (2000). Luke (Vol. 3, pp. 333–334). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

B. The Result of Rejecting the Glory: Punishment (20:9–19)

SUPPORTING IDEA: *Israel's history is one of rejecting God's prophets. Rejecting the beloved Son is only the climax of a history that opposed God and brought punishment on the nation.*

20:9–12. Jesus counterattacked against his opponents with his usual weapon, a parable. The language of this parable has rich associations with Old Testament language (Isa. 5:1–5; Ps. 80:8–13; Isa. 27:2; Jer. 2:21; Ezek. 19:10–14; Hos. 10:1). Usually the vineyard symbolized Israel as a people. Jesus made a subtle play on words. The vineyard became God’s gift to Israel, including the gift of the covenant, the land, the political power, and the promise for future renewal.

The parable was based on the practice of absentee landlords letting hired people till their land for a commission or portion of the profits. Jesus described unexpected reversal. The tenants revolted and mistreated the landlord’s messengers, refusing to pay the owner’s share of the income. This pictures Israel’s history with God’s messengers. He sent them. They killed them. The prophetic message in Scripture they so ardently taught and argued over had its foundation in people who died at the hands of these leaders’ forefathers.

20:13. The owner had Plan B. He sent his only son, the one he loved. Having no respect for messenger slaves, surely the tenants would respect the son who carried all the authority of the father. Here the real meaning of the parable shines through. Jesus is the beloved Son (3:22; cf. 9:35). He is the last of the prophets and more. Would this generation treat Jesus any better than their ancestors treated the prophets?

20:14–15. There was no respect at all for the son. The tenants saw a perfect opportunity to grab authority, power, and wealth for themselves, knowing the law allowed tenants on the land for a minimum of three years to claim property at the death of a sonless landlord. The decision appeared simple—kill the son, take over the property. So they did. Now for Plan C: What will the landlord do to these murderous tenants? They had omitted one small detail from their plan. The landlord remained alive.

20:16. Jesus had a quick answer. Plan C meant the landlord would come himself with proper backup. He would seize the evil tenants and kill them. Then he would find other tenants who would take care of the vineyard and pay him his share of the profits.

The religious leaders were clever enough teachers and students of history to realize what Jesus meant. They were the evil tenants. They faced God’s punishment for shamefully treating the prophets and for their plans to kill the Son. They used a curse formula to express their reaction. No! Never let this happen. Do not upset our secure and comfortable religious apple cart.

20:17. Jesus subtly continued the battle of authority. He took the authority they held dearest, the Scriptures. He quoted Psalm 118:22. He used their methods of interpretation to push the psalm back at them. The cornerstone or foundation stone was placed at the corner of the building. It bore the weight of the two walls that intersected at the corner. It could be said that it held up the building.

Israel’s leaders were supposed to be builders of God’s kingdom, equipping God’s people to carry out his mission. He sent his Son to them, but they rejected him. They killed him. Now what would happen? God would take Christ, the one they rejected and killed, and establish a whole new building on him. God’s vineyard would no longer be in the hands of authorities who were trained by rabbis or authorities based on racial or priestly heredity, or authorities based on leadership experience among the Jews. The new authority would be directly from God through his Son Jesus. On Jesus he would raise the walls of his church. The temple would be destroyed. Gentiles would become part of God’s people built on Christ.

20:18. Jesus changed the stone image a bit. The stone changes from being a support system for a building to being a freestanding stone against which you may smash something or under which you may crush something. Either way, it remains an instrument of destruction. Christ thus

carries two identities. He is the cornerstone on which the entire weight of the church rests. He is the millstone on which Israel's corrupt religious leaders and religion will be destroyed.

20:19. Infuriated the religious leaders now had to kill Jesus. They wanted to do it immediately, but a barrier remained. To arrest Jesus was to incite the crowd into a rebellious mob. What was right did not matter. Only two criteria determined their actions: what preserved their authority and what preserved their power base with the people.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 20:9-19). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

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