

Luke 20:9-19 *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, "God forbid!" 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 cornerstone'? ¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone 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.*

His Final Steps Led to his Enemies

1. A parable of truth
2. A parable of prophecy
3. A parable of warning

We are coming to the end of our trip, following Jesus' final steps. We have watched Jesus walk his final steps to a tomb, to a dinner celebration, to his Father's house, to a fig tree and to the Passover festival. His steps take an unusual turn this week as we watch his final steps led to his enemies. Today, we see Jesus confronted by his enemies and we see him respond with a parable. It is a parable of truth, a parable of prophecy and a parable of warning.

"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. Jesus pictures the kingdom of God as a vineyard. It's a similar parable to the one Isaiah used in chapter five of his prophecy. The farmers in this vineyard are the leaders of Israel, the High Priest and the ruling council, the Sanhedrin. By saying that a man came and planted a vineyard, Jesus first of all reminded the Israelites that they had not volunteered to become God's people. No, God had "planted" them. In the same way, if we are part of God's family through faith in Christ Jesus, it isn't because we made some decision to become part of his family. No, God the Holy Spirit planted this faith in our hearts when he came to us through Word and Sacrament.

For centuries God blessed the Israelites with advantages and privileges unparalleled in this history of the world. Not only did the Lord rescue them from slavery in Egypt, he also destroyed enemy armies and cities. He fought for them and gave them a fertile land in which to prosper. But he didn't stop there. He also communicated his holy, saving Word to them. No other nation had been blessed that much or that well.

In Jesus' parable, when the owner commissions a servant to collect the percentage due the owner, what happens? Servant 1 is beaten and sent away empty-handed. Servant 2? The same. Servant 3? Even worse. They wounded him, literally traumatized him, and threw him out. These tenant farmers sound like a drug-dealing cartel protecting their cocaine fields from a raid.

There's no way this would happen in real life. A landowner would not show that much tolerance to treacherous tenants. And that's exactly the point. Jesus is showing the incredible patience of God with the Jewish nation.

If you plant a garden, you hope for juicy tomatoes, sweet carrots, tender broccoli, delicious corn and spicy radishes. In other words, you expect fruit from you garden. Our God has the same hopes and expectations of you. He wants fruits of faith from you. He expects time, talent and treasure from you. And he is only expecting what he deserves for the gift of salvation he has given us in Jesus Christ. He wants to see repentance growing on you like grapes – bunches of them, every day. But we often cheat our God by saying we are too busy and we don't have time to pray, to read the Word, to serve others in love. We cheat the landlord when we bring meager portions of our income to him, or worse, nothing at all for the spread of the gospel.

This parable is a parable of truth showing Israel how they had disrespected God in their history. This is also a parable of prophecy about what's going to happen.

"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. According to the laws of that day, under certain conditions, if the owner died leaving no heir, whoever claimed the estate, especially the current occupants, was allowed to have it. So, get rid of the son, the heir, and they could claim the estate for themselves.

Jesus is showing that sin really is a question of authority. Sinful people want authority over their lives apart from God. We sin, not because we lack the knowledge of what God requires, but because we refuse his authority over our lives. We would rather run our own lives and live as we please. We would rather be like God than obey God. It's the same temptation Satan laid out to Eve, "You will be like God."

Jesus is also showing he knew their hearts. The Jewish leaders had already decided that Jesus needed to go. This was a parable of prophecy, telling them that he knew exactly what they intended to do to him. They intended to kill him. The High Priest, Caiaphas, had famously said, "It is better that one man die, than the whole nation perish." They thought that by killing Jesus, they could retain their place under Roman rule.

Sad, but true: Even in the church today, there can be struggles for power. We can forget that the church belongs to Christ, not us. Church leaders can begin to look on the church as their own personal domain. They can be more interested in protecting their power and positions rather than using them to serve.

And that's why Jesus told this parable. This was a parable of truth, a parable of prophecy and a parable of warning. *"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, "God forbid!" 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 cornerstone'? ¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone 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.*

Have you purchased anything lately that doesn't have a warning label attached to it? It seems to me that everything now from artwork to zippers comes with warnings – some of them quite humorous. For example, irons have warning labels that read: "Never iron clothes while wearing them." If you rent a superman costume for Billy's birthday party, the label will caution, "Cape does not enable user to fly." Apparently, these warnings are necessary because not everyone uses their head when it comes to dangers that should be obvious. In this parable Jesus is warning us to not reject God's claim on your life. "Don't reject God's call to repent and don't reject God's Christ for salvation."

Jesus here was living the parable. The Son of the owner was standing amongst the greedy tenants. He knew what they were plotting to do. But instead of sending them to hell right on the spot, Jesus warned them with this clear parable. The love of God in this instance is shocking. Jesus loved even them and warned them with this parable. If I knew someone was plotting my murder, I certainly would have a hard time saving his life. But that's how much Jesus cared! He still wanted them to see their sins and their need for a Savior.

Have you ever seen those large rock chimneys? Maybe in a fancy home or supper club up north? Do you ever wonder how they fit those different sized rocks together to make the chimney? It's kind of like a jigsaw puzzle. This one fits here, that one there. And some don't fit at all. He tosses them to the side as unworkable. That's what the Jewish leaders did with Jesus. They rejected him as the Messiah. But it wasn't their choice. He was God's choice. He was God's Messiah, whether they accepted him or not.

Jesus is the stone; we are the glass. If you like your particular sin more than Jesus and refuse to repent, Jesus is the stone that will smash you to pieces. Jesus doesn't want to shatter anyone, but he will if a person stubbornly clings to a sin in unbelief. That's why he told this parable. It is a parable of warning.

It's also a parable of promise. As I said before, Jesus used this parable to tell the Jewish leaders he knew what they would soon do to him. He was letting them and his disciples know that he was willingly going to his death for them and for us. Yes, this is a parable of warning, but a warning from God's heart, that same heart that sent his Son to the vineyard, to his death to save us from our sins. Embrace the Son in faith. Trust in his death for you. Cling to the Cornerstone of your salvation.