

The Parable of the Wicked Tenants

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[0:00] To Luke chapter 20. Luke chapter 20. If you have a Bible in your pew there, it's on page 1045 in your pew Bible. We are jumping in our storyline. You know we've been going through the book of the Gospel of Luke.

We're jumping this morning to the really preceding days before Passover. And the Last Supper and the Good Friday and then Easter Sunday in the life of Jesus.

So he's now, so far in the Gospel of Luke, he's been making his way to Jerusalem. He's in Jerusalem now. We skipped the triumphal entry. We'll go back to that next week on Palm Sunday. But he's in Jerusalem in our text this morning. He's been now, every day, going to the temple to preach the Gospel.

That's what Luke tells us. Jesus had arrived with fanfare and with public acclaim to Jerusalem. And he came to his father's house, to the temple itself.

[1:18] And the first thing he did when he arrived at the temple is that he drove out the money changers from the temple. If you remember that account of Jesus driving out in righteous anger and upending their tables in the temple.

So at this point, just to paint a picture for us, Jesus is, well, he's not a private, he's not going around Jerusalem, you know, just with his 12 disciples.

Everywhere he went, there was a crowd following him. Hearing him, wanting to hear what he has to say. He is famous. But he's also in the crosshairs of the leaders in Jerusalem and in Israel.

If you look in your Bible to the end of chapter 19, Luke summarizes the atmosphere in which Jesus is operating at this point. Verse 47 and 48 of chapter 19 tells us that Jesus was preaching every day in the temple.

But the chief priests, look at this group of people here. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people were looking for a way to kill him.

[2:34] But they could not find a way to do it because all the people were captivated by his teaching. So this is the atmosphere in which Jesus is operating now. He's in the crosshairs of these people.

And look at the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders. That is just a summary of all the woos who in Jerusalem, who have power, who have influence, who have status.

The powerful, the well-known, the influential are all against him. And so this is, it was in this light, in this sort of charged moment, that these people now come to Jesus in chapter 20.

Luke tells us they all came, right? All of them, all people, different sections of the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders, came up to Jesus. Why do you think they came up to him?

By the way, we've just set the scene. Jesus is not alone, or just with the 12. He's in a public space. He's in a temple. There's a crowd around him, hearing him preach the gospel.

[3:43] They were threatened by Jesus. That's what's going on here. Jesus threatens their position, and their power, and their influence. So, in this passage, they come to challenge him.

It is important to know that, again, this is a public thing going on here. The crowd we see in this story, it's as if the crowd that are following Jesus are also active participants in this encounter.

They were listening to the rulers as they came to question Jesus, and they were listening actively to Jesus' response. So, it's almost like, you know, all human beings love conflict.

I don't mean that to say that we all like to participate in conflict, but we love to view it, right? There's a reason why rubbernecking is a thing, right?

Or you just want to see something when it happens. And so, this is riveting stuff that's going on here. And it's a human tendency to want to, like, you know, look and observe, you know.

[4:52] So, there's a rubbernecking effect going on as these people come to Jesus. They were looking, the crowd is looking on with curiosity and with special interests.

They were eavesdropping on what's going on, actively eavesdropping. And they're meant to eavesdrop. Jesus knew they were there. The rulers knew they were there. That was why the whole encounter happens in public, in this case.

And in some ways, the people themselves were props for effect in the machinations of the rulers of Jerusalem. They want to challenge Jesus before the crowd.

They want to humiliate Jesus. Man, who does this guy think he is? Coming into Jerusalem with all this fanfare. Where in charge here? And so, they want to ridicule him and humiliate him in front of the people.

So, they intentionally came for this purpose. And they said to Jesus, Jesus, they said, Tell us, tell us by what authority you do these things that you do.

[5:54] Or who it is that gave you this authority. Authority. That's, they've put their thumb on the scale here.

That's the issue. By which power do you operate? Imagine, you imagine that you, you know, Joe Schmo, you're doing something and a bunch of lawyers come around.

And political leaders come around. And professors come around. And they come at you with their, you know, with their judge robes and their lawyers and their brick cases and start to query you.

You will feel threatened. Just by the, whether you're in the right or not, by the nature of the people that are coming at you, you will naturally feel threatened.

These people have credentials. These people have credentials. Credentials. The people that are coming to Jesus. They have respectability. They have influence. If we're, if we're to be more juvenile in our characterization, these people are the cool kids in the school.

[7:09] They're popular kids. Challenging you before the rest of the class. But as we see in the encounter, the true authority, the person with true power is Jesus.

And he wasn't moved, was he? It's an example, actually, for us. Jesus, and you will see the disciples themselves after Pentecost, start to emulate Jesus in this.

They were, Jesus was able to tell the difference between those who come seeking in true sincerity to learn about God. And he, in kind, he told them and he preached the gospel to them.

But he was also able to know when people came just to challenge him. To, as rebellion, as rebellious children of God, to challenge God himself.

And he, in kind, didn't entertain them. This might be a, this is a good model for us to engage people. Now, we don't want to, you know, we ought to be wise and discerning about being able to tell the difference.

[8:18] We don't want to go around, if someone comes to you and tell you, you know, what do you believe? On what basis do you believe it? You better be able to tell the difference between the intent of that person.

It's always to err on the side of safety and tell them what you believe and preach the gospel to them. But if it's somebody that you know is just, you know, someone that ridicules the faith, you know, after a while, you know, it's all right to actually engage in the way Jesus engages here.

To say, well, you know, on what basis do you even have? On what, on what legs do you have to stand to question the God who created you? The God of the universe. So Jesus asked, and this is masterful what Jesus does here.

He asked them, well, I'll ask you a question. What's the baptism of John from heaven? Or was it from man? This is John the Baptist that he's referring to.

This is the John he's referring to. John the Baptist is revered by the people, by the crowd, as a prophet of God. He's revered especially, not only as a prophet, but as a recent martyr for God.

[9:24] So he's a famous, revered man. And so this question that Jesus asked them puts them on the back foot. Because everyone knows that these people didn't like John either.

Just like they didn't like Jesus, they didn't like John. They hated John because John was already preaching the gospel to them to turn to Jesus and they refused. And so Jesus asked them that.

And you can see that we were given a view as they thought about how to answer the question.

They knew they couldn't say that John's baptism, which means not only is baptism, but also the gospel he preached.

His whole message, his whole ministry is wrapped up in the view of his baptism here. They couldn't say that John was from heaven. They knew they couldn't say that because they would already condemn themselves if they do that.

Well, they know, they said it to themselves. If we say he's from heaven, you will say that why didn't you believe him? And not only is it that he's from heaven.

[10:32] Look at, remember John's message. Remember John's, John was the forerunner of Jesus. Who did he preach about? Who did he point to? It was Jesus himself that he pointed to.

So for you to say, John is from heaven, you would have had to, why didn't you believe him? And if, why didn't you believe him? Why didn't you believe, why don't you believe me? Because he prophesied about me.

So they couldn't say that. But they also knew they couldn't say that he's from man. Because he was revered among the people. So they said, we don't know.

But they do know. I want to point out that they do know the right answer. But they refuse to acknowledge the right answer. That's what's going on here.

And it's apparent to the crowd. Again, this is being played out in front of the crowd. It's apparent to everybody that Jesus got them. So you can imagine, actually, some people are probably hooting and hooling in the background.

[11:32] And noise like, yep, he got them. And they weren't well liked by the crowd either. And so, but Jesus not only does that, he continues.

This is important to see, really, the level of duplicity from these leaders. Remember that John himself called them brood of vipers?

Jesus, later on, used the same word to describe them. Jesus called them whitewashed tombs.

These leaders of Jerusalem saw themselves as the gatekeepers of God.

They are the gatekeepers to the temple, to the religious life of Israel. They did this while rejecting God himself and failing to fear God, whom they were called to point the people towards.

They were called to be Israel's shepherds and to tend to Israel as God's vineyard. But instead, they blasphemed God's name.

[12:40] They abused their authority. And they were concerned with keeping power and influence rather than faithfulness to the God who invested them with the authority that they had.

And Jesus has been calling them out to this point. He goes into the temple, approves it, and says, this is not what the temple is ought to be about. And he's been preaching with authority.

And so this is Jesus, a faithful shepherd. And these are these leaders who are false shepherds of Israel. And since they were corrupt and faithless shepherds of God's people, you can be sure that the crowd was only happy to see them put in their place, so to speak, as Jesus does here.

But Jesus not only does that. He now drives the point home. This is what this parable is all about here. He drives the point home with this parable of the wicked tenants.

This is one of Jesus' parables that doesn't need explaining. It's quite clear what it is about. By the time Jesus finished telling it, the people knew themselves.

[13:51] And the leaders knew who he was talking about. Luke tells us that they even sought to arrest him right then at that very moment. They wanted to take him. They wanted to arrest him. They were so enraged.

But they couldn't do it because they feared the people's anger. That was only going to stop them. But this story that Jesus tells, this parable, is one of faithlessness.

It's one of rebellion and of premeditated murder. And the thing is, again, we see their reaction. It's because it's a true story that Jesus was telling in this parable.

We already know that these leaders had murder in their hearts already. End of chapter 19, they were already seeking to kill him. For us, though, the story is also a description.

I want us to see here. The story is a description of every human heart in its unbelief. And it's a warning to us about God's impending judgment over our rejection of him.

[14:58] But even in this story, we see the gospel. It tells us of the heart of God. It tells us of his patience and his kindness that is meant to lead us to repentance.

Let's first look at the unbelief there. So, I don't imagine there's a lot of tenant farming in New York State. Perhaps there is.

I don't know of it. But the concept is not hard for us to understand. The owner is entitled to a share of the harvest of profit from his land.

Hard agreement between him and the caretakers of the land. And that's what's going on here. In fact, in this particular story, this vineyard was planted by the owner himself.

He planted it. And now he has these tenants, these caretakers, placed there to take care of it. To take care of the vineyard. To water, to weed, to prune the trees.

[16:01] And at the appropriate time, to gather the harvest. The harvest is fruit. Now, for Jesus' hearers, they would easily, readily recognize the Old Testament language that is being archived to here by the image of vineyard.

In the Old Testament, Israel is seen as, Israel, the nation, the whole nation is seen as God's vineyard. God is the owner. And their leaders that God has called, the priests, the kings, the temple magistrates, and all of those people are called by God to serve God by tending the vineyard, to tend to the people, to care for them, to lead them, to know more about God, to lead them towards God. That was their role. That was their job. So that the people can bear good fruit. So, Jesus' hearers would have readily understood what's going on here. They would have heard echoes of Isaiah chapter 5.

You don't have to turn there, but I'm going to read a few of the verses. Isaiah chapter 5, verse 1 to 7. It starts with saying, I will sing about the one I love, a song about my loved one's vineyard.

This is from God's perspective. The one I love had a vineyard and a very fertile ill. This is God. He broke up the soil, cladded up stones, and planted with the finest vines.

[17:27] He built a tower in the middle of it. He even dug out a wine press there. And he expected it to yield good grapes. But he yielded worthless grapes. This has been Israel's history.

So now, residents of Jerusalem, the prophet Isaiah says, and men of Judah, please judge between me and my vineyard. What more could I have done for my vineyard than I did?

Why, when I expected a yield of good grapes, did it yield worthless grapes? Now I will tell you what I'm about to do to my vineyard. I will remove its edge. It will be consumed.

I will tear down its walls. And it will be trampled. I will make it a wasteland. It will not be pruned or weeded. Thorns and brewers will grow up.

I will also give orders to the clouds that rain should not fall on it. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel. This is God, through the prophet Isaiah, condemning Israel for their unfaithfulness.

[18:41] Both the leaders who are supposed to lead them towards righteousness and justice, and the people themselves. And this is, so the image is made clear here. And in this story, in this parable of Jesus' house, the owner sends three successive servants.

And what did these tenants do to these servants as they came? They dealt with them shamefully.

They beat them up and they cast them out. They wounded them. The servants here are representative of Israel's prophets throughout our history.

God sent his servants, the prophets, to Israel, to call them back to himself, to call them back to faithfulness, to bearing good fruit. And what did Israel do?

Jesus himself said in Luke 13, verse 34, on his way to Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you will kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to her.

How often I want to gather your children together as a hen, gather as a chicks under her wings. But you were not willing. Israel hasn't been willing to come to God.

[19:51] And this is the condemnation. Israel has always, always in its history beaten, jailed, and killed its prophets. The tenants, the leaders themselves, representing the leadership, are denying the owner of his rightful due in this story.

They have overstepped their role as caretakers. And now they've usurped the title of owner. This is made very clear in their treatment of the owner's servants.

But look, look there. Three successful servants are sent. But we see the owner's heart for his vineyard. And even for the tenants themselves, for the leaders.

At this point, what would you do if you are the owner? I'm sure, like me, you would have served an eviction notice. After the first, you might not even have sent the, I wouldn't have sent the first servant.

But look what the owner does in this story. Verse 13. Gives us a look into the divine counsel of heaven. God deliberates as to will to send.

[21:04] As he chooses. God chooses to send his own beloved son. Again, it's clear here who's been referred to. So far throughout Luke, we've heard the phrase, my beloved son from God,

directed towards who?

Jesus himself. He is God's beloved son. And in this parable, God sent his beloved son. God shows to them the length he's willing to go to, to call his tenants and his servants back to faithfulness. It would have been clear to the tenants themselves and to the crowd who are listening in. And Jesus foreshadows, even in this parable, his own coming death at the ends of this wicked leaders. It's almost like this parable is kind of like a paraphrase of what's about to happen in a few days. In probably a day or two. God sent his supreme messenger, his own son, his own heir. Now, what's the significance of sending your own heir? He's himself the owner. This son himself is the owner. He's the owner's son.

[22 : 23] The heir of all of these things are rightfully his, by law, to claim ownership of. The vineyard is his. And he comes at the behest of his father.

This is a living parable, as Jesus is telling it. He has claim of ownership, this son does. And he has authority, the same authority of his father, as being the son in place, in standing, in the standing of his father.

That is clear by reason of his identity, as son and as heir. Yet these leaders of Jerusalem, look what they did in the beginning of these, of chapter 20.

They recognize this, but they come asking, By whose authority do you come? Israel has always done this in its history. They did it to Moses, God's servant.

Who placed you as leaders over us? They said to Moses. And here they're doing it to God's supreme messenger. By whose authority do you come?

[23 : 37] But Jesus reveals to us the true intention of their hearts in this parable. They have long, these people, have long rejected God as owner of the vineyard.

They've, they even, you can see it in the story, they hated the owner. They hated his rule and lordship over them. They see now a clear way to not only, to not, to, to, to take ownership themselves by killing the son.

They, they, they, they assume, if, well, if we kill him, then the, the, the land would just revert to us. Squad is right, I guess. They've set themselves against God's redemptive purpose and against the redeemer who got, who got sent.

But Jesus asked, Jesus asked at the end here of the story, what more, what more, what else can the owner do? And the question is, is, is, is, it's addressed to us as well.

After all of this, seeking out the lost, what else can the, the owner do when they've rejected the son whom he sent? There is no greater messenger than him.

[24 : 57] So verse 16, he will come, the owner will, and kill those farmers and give the vineyard to others. Do you want to, do you want to question the justice of that action?

No. It is, it is long overdue. God will destroy, Jesus says, these evildoers and others will take their place.

Now, this is important. He will give, he will give the vineyard to others. That resonated with the leaders as they heard it. Hearing this, they cried out in response, God forbid.

That's what that means. That must never happen, they said. What have they been guarding all along? The power and authority and influence. And so to think of God's giving that, and especially here, the illusion is to Gentiles.

God will give ownership of the vineyard to Gentiles. God will give and they will no longer be gatekeepers. That's what this, this is. And so they cried out in response, God forbid.

[26 : 08] But Jesus responds to them. And he quotes Psalm 118, verse 22. What then is this that is written?

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. And then he, he again paraphrased Isaiah chapter 8.

which says that this stone, this particular stone, will be for many in Israel a stumbling stone on which many will stumble over it and be broken.

Apostle Peter, later in, in 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 8, also talks about this. And he says, it is because of their own disobedience that they stumble.

That's what stumbling is there. They stumble on God's word. They disobey. So Jesus, the cornerstone, Jesus, the cornerstone, is in himself. Jesus, in himself, as the cornerstone, is God's mercy.

[27:12] Embodiment of God's mercy. It is through him that we have salvation. Right? But he's also God's justice. He's the embodiment of God's justice.

That it is through him that you will be condemned. So you see here, there is only two options when it comes to Jesus, really. You can't be neutral.

There is no neutrality. It is either salvation, mercy, through him, or condemnation and justice meted out from God through him.

Those who come to Jesus in repentance are saved. All who come to Jesus in repentance are saved and received and adopted as sons and daughters.

But those who reject him will be crushed. That's what the cornerstone does. That's the significance here. But it's such a tragic story though.

[28:17] Look at the end. Jesus has told them this. It's implicit in that it's still yet still an invitation to turn.

It's not too late to turn to Christ. But what did they do? Verse 19. The scribes and the chief priests looked for a way to get their ends on him at that very hour because they knew he told the parable against them.

Their hearts are hardened against God. They failed to see the gospel called to repentance in this parable. They failed to see it. I pray that we may not miss it ourselves as you look at it this morning. It's easy to look at this parable and see the owner as foolish. I mean why would he send his son? I mean why did the son go?

I mean did you not see the first three sermons you send? What do you think was going to happen? Fool me once. That's the phrase we know very well.

[29:25] But this isn't just fool me once. It's not fool me twice. It's fool me three times, fool me four times, five times. But yet God keeps pursuing them. So at this point who is the shaman?

But that's just it you see. The owner in this story God himself in his mercy does send his beloved son for that very purpose.

He knows what will happen yet he sends his beloved son to die so that indeed the shame will be on the son so that we will not bear the shame. That is the whole purpose of God sending him.

he came to die and is atoning death for us to bear our shame upon himself. And so if we choose to reject this greater salvation there is no other hope.

There is no other option. And I think in this world of ours we've deceived ourselves in thinking that this is our world. Haven't we?

[30:38] I don't mean necessarily us in this room but look at look at our culture look at our world. We have deceived ourselves to think that we are masters of the universe. Whereas in truth it is God's world.

He's the creator. He made it he made us and he sustains it. The very laws of nature I was having a conversation with two brothers on Friday about this.

the very laws of nature in the world that we live in our culture is trying to upend. This laws of nature that has been outwired by God into the very fabric of creation we're rebelling against it.

We continue to rebel against it today in the same manner as the religious leaders did in Jesus' day. We've rejected God's authority. we don't even try to make a religious pretense anymore about it.

It's not just the religious entities that are rejecting the authority. All over. Last week I mentioned that we live even in this world we live in a religious world.

[31:50] Do you know that? It's just not looking at God. We live in a very religiously charged world presently. but it's a pagan religion.

We've had idols all over that we've erected instead of the true God whom we are to worship. We've rejected his authority. We've denied the very fabrics by which he created the world.

He created us male and female the Bible tells us in his own image to glorify him. And we rejected that. We've declared our independence from God's rule of creation.

We've unpenished the laws of nature to refute even the very binary facts of humans as male and female.

We do all these things because why do we do them ultimately? There's a demonic hand behind it. There's a rebellious heart behind it. It is ultimately to deprive God of the glory that is due him.

[32:57] we would rather glorify ourselves rather than God. And so if you refute the fact that there is male and female created by God in his own image to glorify God, you introduce all these myriads of gender identities, I said this 26 and counting right now, if you introduce that into the world, well,

you know, you have rightfully rebelled against God's very laws.

That's just one aspect, by the way, that's just one aspect of the many ways we rejected God's Lord. But I want us to see though that the rot is not only out there in the world, it's in the church as well, it's among religious people.

Look at this story, these are the religious leaders of the day and the rot is among them. these people were called to lead in the place where God's name is to be most hallowed in the temple. They were called to rejoice in the firm and righteous law of the Lord. That's what they were called to do, these leaders, and to lead God's people in doing that.

Instead, they were idolaters. And it is idolatry. Let's not kid ourselves. Whether it's baptized in religious jargon, or in secular jargon, it's all idolatry when we reject Jesus Christ and choose something else.

[34 : 30] We're rejecting God. When we fail to live under his rule and authority, we're rejecting him. And just as these leaders plot to crucify him, we ourselves can crucify him in our own hearts when we reject his rightful rule over us.

we can reject him. But here Jesus has said, I am the cornerstone. There is the gospel message even in this parable.

Those who come and hide under me will be saved and delivered from judgment. Those who reject will be judged.

this is why we sing this song on Christ the solid rock I stand. All other ground is his sinking sand. This is the gospel message that we proclaim as the church of God. This is what Jesus is proclaiming to the people in Jerusalem. This same gospel has been entrusted to us, you and I, brothers and sisters in Christ.

[35 : 45] And we have to proclaim it. Look in this. We have to proclaim without shame and apology. Without apology. I'll be honest with you. If we do that faithfully, which is what we're called to do, that does mean that the leaders of our day will reject us.

even some in the church who loves positions more than Jesus will reject us. The world will reject you when you stand upon this rock and proclaim it.

And you live as if God is creator and you live under his lordship and his rule. They will seek to ridicule you and intimidate you as they sought to do with Jesus himself.

And there may come a day, as it is for many of our brothers and sisters in many places in the world today, when they will beat you and jail you and maybe even kill you for your faith.

But there is no other option. The call is to faithfulness come what may. The call is to faithfulness as the people of God.

[37 : 01] But here is the thing. Faithfulness to God will not come when those kind of persecution comes. If we are not faithful now, today, at this very moment, if we do not live as if we are under God's rule and authority, if we are not faithful now in the little things, we would not be able to face the daunting task that comes, that will come.

So there is the warning in this story. But there is also a warning here to remember that it is not by our own strength that we do this.

All that God is calling for is to turn to Him and He empowers us to do it. He gives us the strength. He gives us His Holy Spirit.

it. And not only does He give us that, He carries our shame and our guilt upon Himself so that He absorbs us of our guilt, of our ruin, and He makes His sons and daughters.

He brings us into His family, covers us under His wings. He redeems us. Let us pray. Amen.