

Lessons from Difficult Tenants

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 10th of February 2002. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled Lessons from Difficult Tenants and is based on Luke chapter 20 verses 9 to 19.

Father, we do indeed pray that you would take us, that you would use us, that you would change us and renew us, that we may be living sacrifices for you.

We pray that as we come to your word this morning that you will be working in our lives, that we may live lives that bring glory and honour to your Son. Father, I pray that you will be with me as well as I preach, that you will give me the words to say and that it may be clear.

We pray this in your Son's name. Amen. On the farm that I grew up on, we had some rams.

[1 : 08] Now these rams respected no one. They feared no one. And they were huge. My father tells me of the story of the time that we had one of the rams in the race.

And my father said, just hop in there and move it along. I knew better. I knew what this ram was like. I knew it did not respect my authority as being the owner's son.

He didn't respect that. I said, I don't think so, Dad. And so my sister, who was younger than me, said, I'll do it, Dad. And she jumped in and walked up towards this ram.

Well, the ram didn't respect her authority either, being the daughter of the owner. But she got the ram charged towards her and knocked her for a somersault. That was much smarter than that.

Much smarter. But the rams did not respect my authority. I soon worked out a way of being able to get around this difficult problem. Being a very small boy myself and being the rams being very big, I decided the best way to get these rams moved to the place where I wanted them to be was to get on my horse and ride around on my horse until I got close enough to this ram that I would leap off the horse onto the back of the ram and ride the ram to the paddock that had to go.

[2 : 29] It was the only way. It's true. That's the way that I had to deal with these rams. It was the only way that it would respect me. We live in a world that does not respect authority.

One of the catch cries, I think, of our society is, I'm free to do what I want any old time. It's a song. I don't know if many of you know that, but it's a song that I think just really typifies our society.

We don't want to be under the authority of others. We're free. We can do what we want to do any old time. There was a bike rider in our bike club up at Bathurst and he typified this.

He was an elderly man, but he wasn't going to let anyone tell him what to do, including the government. So when the government brought out this new rule that you were to wear a helmet on your head when riding, he wasn't going to obey that.

He was free to do whatever he want. He wasn't going to obey that authority, and so he rode around with no helmet. Despite the stupidity of doing that, he didn't wear it. Well, we're going to be looking in our passage today of the Jerusalem leaders and how they did not respect Christ's authority.

[3 : 45] I mean, I'll look at that in respect to our lives. So you might like to have the passage open to chapter 20, verse 9 through to 19.

Jesus has finally arrived in Jerusalem. The journey that we saw starting at chapter 9 where Jesus looked resolutely towards Jerusalem, knowing that that's where his mission lie, where he was going to go towards Jerusalem, he is finally there.

He's coming in a triumphant procession, riding on the back of a colt as a king, and everyone's singing Hosanna to him. You can imagine the Jewish leaders at this.

Who is this king? And much to their disgust, he walks into their temple, this great temple that they are the authorities, where their authority comes from. He walks in there and he kicks out the merchants, the arrogance of the man.

How dare Jesus come in and do this? And if that's not worse, he then comes in day in and day out and preaches the good news.

[4 : 54] Well, the leaders have had enough of this. And we see at the beginning of chapter 20 that the leaders come up to Jesus and say, what's your authority that you're doing this? Where did you get it from?

Who gives you this authority? Well, Jesus, demonstrating his great skill at dealing with this type of hostile interrogation, asks a loaded question back.

Tell me, John's baptism, was it from heaven or from men? You see there in 20 verse 4. Well, why are they thinking about this? Because they know it's a trick question.

They're fumbling around trying to think, how are we going to answer this? If we go one way, we're going to get in trouble. If we go the other way, we're going to get in trouble. What are we going to do here? And while they're fumbling around trying to work out the answer, Jesus tells this parable, the parable that we're going to look at today, of the wicked tenants.

And there he answers the question. Before we look at this, keep in mind that question. What authority do you have, Jesus? What is your authority? Keep in mind that he's preaching this parable in the context of the temple.

[6 : 06] With the leaders there wanting to kill Jesus, we're seeing right back at chapter 9, their intent is to kill him. They don't want him. They don't want his authority. Keep that in mind as Jesus tells this parable.

Well, it's another great parable in that it brings both agriculture and some business dealings together. and I guess would have been clear for the people of that day, for them to understand and learn something from.

And so Jesus tells this parable of an owner who builds this fantastic vineyard. You can just picture it. There is the owner out there digging the ground, chucking out the stones, putting in the vines, watering them, letting them grow.

A fantastic vineyard. And then he leases it out and he goes away to a far country. And so the tenants come in and they look after it and they tend it and look after it and care for it.

And soon the harvest time comes around. So they gather the crops and as it was the custom and as they were tenants, part of it was to go back to the owner.

[7 : 12] So the owner sends a slave to go and collect the produce. Well, the tenants, being wicked tenants that they are, decide in verse 10 that they will beat this slave and I'll send him away empty handed.

In verse 11, we see that another slave is sent. Again, he is insulted, sent away empty handed. In verse 12, it says, and still he sent, still a third.

This one they also wounded and threw out. Three, they come to him to collect the rent and they don't get it. Well, then the owner says, what am I going to do?

I know what I'll do. I'll send my son. They'll respect my son, surely. So he sends his son. The son goes in and asks for the money and as he's coming towards them, the owners see the son and think, here's a good idea.

This is what we'll do. Let's kill him, get rid of him and that way the inheritance will be ours. It'll be our inheritance. The vineyard will be ours.

[8 : 15] There'll be no one else to look after. It'll be ours. Let's kill him. So they killed the son and threw him out, Jesus says in the parable. Jesus then goes on to say, what will the owner do?

Well, we see that the owner kills the tenants and gives it to others. You can imagine this, if Current Affair was back in those days, hearing this story, couldn't you?

Or the talkback radio shows. You know, you just see it. You know, wicked tenants and of the owner. You know, and you just see, you know, Current Affair, the camera panning across the vineyards, you know, lovely shot there, the beautiful vines and the lovely fruit and, you know, then they'll pan across and there is the son dead on the ground.

You know, and they interview the owner. Well, you know, how do you feel about this? You know? And, you know, obviously are very angry about this and, you know, then they might try and get some interviews from the wicked tenants, you know, and of course they'll, you know, no, no, no, no, no, no comment and they're trying to hide behind their car or whatever they're doing, behind their camel, you know, and you can just see it, can't you?

And at the end of the program, you know, it's, what outrage, these wicked tenants. What an outrage. And the truth is, that's not half the story of the outrage that this parable is speaking about because it's speaking about the son, about Jesus.

[9 : 40] Well, as we start looking at this parable, it's pretty clear who Jesus is referring to and the different people in the parable. You know, the parables that we've looked at in this series, sometimes it's been a little difficult to try and work out what Jesus is saying and who the different characters represent.

But in this parable, it's crystal clear, absolutely clear who the people are, who the different characters represent in the story. The owner, God.

It's God's vineyard. He's the one who has planted it. For those who knew their Old Testament back in the day when Jesus was saying this, when Jesus, as soon as Jesus was speaking about the vineyard, Isaiah 5 would have come to their mind where it spoke about Israel being a fruitless vineyard, not producing fruit.

It's clear that the wicked tenants in the parable are Israel's leaders. Later on in verse 19, the scribes and the chief priests realised that this parable was told against them.

Even they realised the wicked tenants were them. This is who Jesus was speaking about. It's clear also that the son in the parable was Jesus.

[11 : 04] It's clear that the slaves that the owner sent were God's prophets that he sent throughout time trying to warn Israel's leaders to be faithful and give to God what was due.

It's clear that this parable is speaking against the leaders. It is a strong warning for them to recognise the authority of Christ.

Well there are three things that we're going to learn that Jesus teaches I think from this parable. The first thing that Jesus pulls out from this parable is he points out the condition of humans. As we look through you see there time and time again that the tenants keep on beating up these slaves and throwing them out.

Why don't they give the rent? Why is it that they don't want to pay the rent to the owner? We see in verse 14 they discussed amongst themselves and said this is the heir let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours.

The tenants aren't happy about being tenants. They want to be the owners. They're not content with just being the tenants. They want to be the owners.

[12 : 19] It's the same with Israel's leaders time and time again. They fail to recognise who God is. That he is the owner. He is the one in charge.

He is the one that has authority. Not them. Yet they keep on bowing down to other gods. They fail to depend on God. They trust in their own self righteousness time and time again and yet God time and time again keeps on sending messages to them to remind them Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, all these prophets, even John the Baptist.

And what do they do to them? They abuse them, reject them and kill them. It's not just a problem for the leaders though. It's a problem with humanity.

If you go right back to the Garden of Eden, there we see the Garden of Eden where it all starts, where Adam and Eve bought the lie from the devil. Just eat it and you'll be like God.

Deny God. You can become like God. You will be God. So they ate it. That's the problem with our humanity, isn't it?

[13 : 34] Time and time again we reject God. We want to be God. We deny his authority. Israel's leaders were not content to be the tenants.

They insisted on being the owners. Their insolence. There they were, waving the fist at God, rejecting everything and anybody that God sent them.

They wanted to be in charge. they were not going to give the debt that was owed to him. It's surprising that God tolerated them for so long. The first thing is that we see from this parable is Jesus fully understood the condition of humans, that they rejected God's authority time and time again.

They wanted to be the owners. The second thing that Jesus talks about in this parable that points out is he understood himself, who he was and what his mission was. As we look through there we see God's patience time and time again and in the end he shows his mercy one more time.

He sends his son, Jesus. What mercy. What a gamble of God to send his son, the one whom he loves.

[14:57] Listen to the language in verse 13. what shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Perhaps they will respect him. Beloved son, I love my children.

They are very precious to me. Here is God's son who is very precious to him and he sends them off to the wicked tenants. Jesus understood that he was the son.

He was God's son. The question that was asked back at the beginning of chapter 20. What authority do you have Jesus? It is the authority of God. He is God's son.

He understood it. He understood that he was the Messiah, the great one that was predicted throughout the Old Testament, the one that would bring justice, the one that would judge the world. And here he was in their midst.

Jesus was the one. Jesus also understood his mission as the son. what was it? It was to die.

[16:01] He understood his mission was partly to die. That's the second thing. Jesus understood his mission and who he was. The third thing that we get out of this parable that Jesus makes very clear is he understands the future.

He knows what will happen. In verse verse 15, the owner says, what will the owner of the vineyard do?

Verse 16, he will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Two things. He'll come and destroy those tenants. Jesus knew the future for these wicked tenants, the Israelites.

He knew what their future lie. It was the terrible judgment, the wrath of God. The second thing that Jesus knew also was that the leadership would be handed on to others.

The leadership of God's people would be handed on to the disciples. As a part of that great thing, also the Gentiles would be brought in as a part of God's people.

[17:08] What a great thing this is. But the people in the crowd didn't think so. Listen to their response. Heaven forbid.

May it never be. The crowd that Jesus was speaking to in the tenants recognised that what the tenants was doing was a terrible thing. But they also recognised that the master's response was a terrible thing as well.

New authority. The Gentiles would be coming in. Their privileged position would be lost. May it never be.

Well, Jesus goes on to rebuke them further. Further misunderstanding. And he starts quoting scripture at them. You see in verse 17, then he looked at them and said, what does this text mean? The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. Jesus quotes at them Psalm 118. The stone. Now this seems a little strange to us.

[18:08] Why would Jesus talk about this? But in the context, here in Psalm 118, there was a stone that the builders looked at. It was this odd shape.

It just didn't fit anywhere. It was an ugly stone. And so they left it until they got to the corner of the arch. The cornerstone.

They needed a stone just to fit there. The whole building depended on this stone. It would collapse without it. And there was this odd rejected stone. And there it was.

It fitted in place. In the context of the Old Testament, it spoke of the nation Israel and its king being rejected by the nations. The nations looked at Israel and thought, what a horrible looking nation.

Nothing good can come out of Israel and its king. But God showed them the nations. God said that you will be exalted. If you look up here, you can see the cornerstone just up there.

[19:09] It's the one that's right in the centre of the arch. And it's the thing that holds it all together. You take that odd stone out and it'll collapse. But it is an odd shape. It's not the square bricks that you'll find elsewhere.

It's made up of angles. It's ironical that Jesus uses this. Because in Psalm 118, God used this psalm to encourage the people to take heart.

That they weren't to be discouraged. It was a psalm of encouragement. But now Jesus is turning it on them and saying, you're rejecting the Son. You're rejecting the one that you despised.

Jesus goes on after the parable to go further with some more biblical imagery. Anyone who falls on the stone, this is verse 18, anyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces.

And it will crush anyone whom it falls. Jesus is picking up the imagery found in Psalm Daniel 2 and Isaiah 8. He's picking up this imagery.

[20:22] Anyone who falls on this stone will be smashed. The stone, if it falls on anyone, will be crushed. My uncle had a farm.

And on the farm he had some huge granite boulders. We're not talking about little things that you may have in your garden. They're out in his back paddock. And these things were the size of houses.

They were huge, great granite boulders. I remember being a little boy with my family. And there was one that was probably about the size of a car that was just there. And we all took great delight in trying to roll this stone off the other stones that it was on.

It was huge. We all thought it was small, puny. Surely we could get this thing to move. We couldn't. It was just too big. But I imagine if it actually did start rolling down this hill, this huge great round boulder, nothing could stop it.

It would just crush everything in its way. I have pictures of them, you know, people underneath, very, you know, like a lugwig. No, no, I can't think of the one. Far side cartoon.

[21 : 30] You know, there they are trying to pull the stone, you know, with a rope and the stone coming and falling down on top of them. It was a huge great stone. Here Jesus is using this imagery of the stone crushing those who reject his authority.

It's a terrible picture. A very sombre picture. A picture that was a very strong warning to the leaders of Israel. To reject the Messiah would have devastating results.

Yet we find out in verse 19, despite these strong warnings, they wanted to kill him right there and then. Right there and then they wanted to kill him.

If it wasn't for the people around him, then perhaps they may have. But they feared them as well. It would be easy at this point for us, just to say, well, you know, terrible leaders, terrible thing, you know, and not learn much for ourselves.

But as we read on through the book, we see that Jesus was rejected by the leadership. They did carry out his plan to kill Jesus. That Jesus did in fact die. But we see that Jesus was vindicated by God and was resurrected.

[22 : 50] The leadership was handed on to others. the disciples. And the Gentiles did come in. We are that people. What a great privilege it is that we've been brought into the presence of God through Christ.

Luke wrote these things down so that the early church might know the truth, that we might know the truth. And the truth is, from this passage, is Jesus has authority, has God's authority.

It is right that he is our Lord. It is right that we treat him that way, that we give to him what is due to him, our obedience and our service.

From this passage we also see that we're no better than the leaders of Israel. That we are people that reject God's authority time and time again.

We do what we want to do instead of what Christ wants us to do. We want to be in charge of our lives, our sinful nature.

[23 : 59] If we were back then we would have been no better. Romans speaks about this, that all have rejected God, all have sinned, all are without excuse.

We see from this passage, to reject the authority of Christ is foolishness. Well, have you accepted the Lordship of Christ?

Do you seek to have him as your Lord daily? If you don't, can I encourage you to speak with one of the staff members, to speak about this?

Because there are serious consequences for this. But if you are seeking to have him as Lord, is he Lord of every area of your life? Is he Lord of the way that you use your money?

The way that you use your time? The way that you view your family? The way that you view your job? These are all good gifts from God. They aren't bad things in themselves.

[25 : 05] But when we pursue them and see them as more important than the authority of Christ, then what we are saying to God is we want to be the owners. On Sunday, I was ordained as a deacon.

I have my robes on this morning. I thought I'd even put on my little hood here. It's not the one that I did for my Bachelor of Divinity, but it was my Bachelor of Science.

I thought I would put it all on so that you may see the authority here. You may laugh, but the temptation is for people who go into priesthood is to see that this is where the authority is.

This is where the power is. This is where my self-worth is in my position here. Now, I may not be so crass as to think those things, but I do in subtle ways.

When I come up and preach, I think of how good, well, you know, perhaps how good I could be, you know, that I'll do it on my own back, that I'm really clever, you know, and reject Christ's authority and recognise that he is the one that is in charge.

[26 : 28] He is the one. Power and authority do not reside in priesthood, but in Jesus, the precious stone. I need to have that as a part of my life.

And you could pray that for me, that I always acknowledge Christ as Lord, that I trust in him. We had another ram on our farm.

His name was Snowy, a lovely little thing when he was a lamb. We bottle fed him. But as he grew up, he respected no one.

He feared no one. We all feared him terribly. I don't even know that I would actually go into the same paddock with him, with, you know, even on my horse. He was just a terribly fierce ram.

He was free, he thought, to do whatever he wanted, whenever he wanted. Well, I distinctly remember one day when it got into our house paddock and it chased my sister around with much, I'm sure it was very happy about this whole thing, but my sister was obviously very unhappy about this and was screaming at the top of her lungs.

[27 : 41] Of course, again, I saw this from the sidelines and I thought that it wouldn't respect my authority, so I wasn't going to get involved in this one. And my sister continued to scream.

My father came out of the house and he had, trying to put on his gum boots type thing and he had one on and he came charging down with the other gum boot in his hand. And he charged after Snowy and he clouted Snowy over the nose, gave him a bloody nose and then, you know, dragged it and threw it out of the paddock.

What a foolish ram to think that it could have authority over my father. What a foolish, foolish ram.

What a foolish, foolish people that choose to ignore Christ's authority in their lives.

Thank you, Thomas, and I am truly Hoofrey. You are all one of the wealthy members. What a foolish, foolish go of the ■ciami.

Is king from first izol ■■■ Jesus? To be continued on, Hisepherds loved him and Silas,onna Amin, 15, 61, lones, and what a foolish. survol.

[28 : 51] Walter, recommended him for your words.