

Tenants from hell

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[0 : 0 0] Please sit down. You have sat down. If you would open your Bible please to Luke chapter 20, page 79 and 80. And as you do that, you should know that today is Trinity Sunday and so after our prayers, after the sermon, as our offertory hymn, we're going to sing St. Patrick's Breastplate, which is an ancient and wonderful hymn that picks up the Trinity and binds ourselves to the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

If you're new to church, it's an unusual tune and just for the sake of it we change the tune in verse 5 and then go back to the original tune in verse 6. I just thought you should know that. That's coming up.

It's been six weeks since I've preached and I'm extremely rusty. And I understand from Eric that I made lots of wrong verse references this morning.

So, we're in Luke 20 and I invite you, Eric, if I make a wrong verse reference, just call out the right one. Sure, no problem. I'm on that. I'm on it. Thank you very much.

Well, now I hope, I hope as Sophie read it, you caught the main thing Jesus is saying and that is, God owns us and we are his tenants.

[1 : 1 9] So, I've done some research this week on tenants from hell and I've come across some great stories. I wish I could tell you all of them. Turning a rented lounge suite into a wildlife sanctuary.

Running a motor bicycle mechanic store from a basement in rental accommodation.

My favourite one comes from East Van and it's just a couple of months ago. A couple decided to rent out their basement for some extra money. Let's call him Peter.

And a young man came and asked to rent the basement. He was polite, well dressed and paid his first month's rent in advance. That was the last rent they saw. After a week or so, his cousins moved in.

Cousins moved in. And they heard strange noises and loud music. And that's not strange. But after a few months, Peter was in the garage one night when he heard one of the basement dwellers calling out, Fire, fire.

[2 : 2 4] Now, unknown to Peter, the guy who had rented the basement had bought a propane tank and hot plates and was cooking crystal meth in the bathroom.

This is better than a grow-up. This is crystal meth. And I have friends that bought a house in Shaughnessy that had a grow-up in it. I should tell you, this has got nothing to do with this story.

And for the first six months they lived in the house, they were a completely different couple. Much more mellow. Anyway, Peter ran to the...

Verse 63. Peter ran to the door, knocked on the door. The tenant opened the basement door, said, Everything's fine, everything's fine, everything's fine.

Closed the door. Five seconds later, there was an explosion. Blew the door off the hinges. Burnt Peter's eyebrows off his face. Cracked the walls. Lifted the floor.

- [3 : 25] Smashed the windows. And it cost \$300,000 to fix. It's a great story, isn't it? Now, there are landlords from hell and there are lots of stories about them.
- Mostly they're in England, though. LAUGHTER But by far the preponderance are tenants from hell. Now, the parable that Jesus tells in the centre of this story is really the story of the world.
- It's the whole of creation. God makes a garden, places us in the garden. He is the owner. We are his creatures. And we have an irrational, inbuilt hostility to the fact that he's our owner.
- It's something that is just bizarre about us as humans. And so we treat God shabbily and shamefully and we pretend, you are not the owner.
- I am the owner of myself. I refuse to let you be the owner. And that is why Jesus came. So that's at the heart of what we're looking at. Last week, Keith showed us that we've come in Luke's Gospel to Jerusalem.
- [4 : 36] And last week, you remember, as Jesus rode in and the crowds hailed him as God's king, Jesus goes straight up to the temple and he kicks out the flea market and he then begins to preach the Gospel, verse 1 in our chapter.
- And if you've been reading Luke's Gospel, this is amazing stuff. Here is the king of God, the son of God, the one who can raise the dead, who touches lepers, who forgives our sins, who preaches about heaven, who invites us into the kingdom.
- And here he is. He's reclaimed the house of God for what its purpose is so that salvation will flow from the house of God to all people, to the Gentiles.
- It's wonderful. He is deeply hated by the religious authorities and yet there he is offering forgiveness and freedom and the feast of God as it ought to be.
- And they do hate him. Just in 1947, the last phrase, the chief priests and scribes and the principal men of the people sought to destroy him.
- [5 : 48] I mean, you just, to tear him apart. Because here is a group of men whose whole identity and status is caught up in maintaining a religious system.
- I mean, their whole view of themselves came from where they were in the institutional, hierarchical, religious system. Oh yes, the system had to do with God. But gradually the mechanisms of the system, the visible outside mechanisms of the system had become much more important and when God comes to the temple, they want to kill him.
- They don't like the fact that he's the owner. And I say this because churches are prone to this and we as Christians are prone to this. We join churches, we sense the reality of God, we want to grow to know Jesus Christ and gradually we become invested in structures and programs and those visible external mechanisms slowly displace God and we worship those because those are the things that give us our justification and give us our sense of status and our sense of importance.
- And when God reasserts his ownership over us, our first reaction is hostility. Three sections in the passage, verses 1 to 8, then the parable 9 to 19 and then the Caesar passage.
- And all three sections have to do with ownership. The first, in verses 1 to 8, I've called false ownership. And if you look down in verse 2, the scribes and elders and chief priests barge right into the middle of a speech of Jesus, they interrupt him and they say, who gave you the authority to say the things and do the things you're doing.
- [7 : 34] Show us your licence. This is our jurisdiction. And of course they are acting as though they are the owners of Israel.
- They are the owners of the temple. And the first question of anyone who takes their meaning and identity from a religious institution is, what is your jurisdiction?

Where is your licence? They don't come up to Jesus and say, could it be that what you are saying is from God? Is it true? Does it fit with the rest of what God says?

No, no, no, they say, where is your official permit? And how does Jesus deal with it? Verse 3, very, very wonderfully. He says, now let me ask you a question. You're talking about authority.

You can't even recognise the authority of God in the flesh staring you in the face. John the Baptist, the last prophet that God said. Did his authority come from heaven, from God?

[8 : 35] Was he speaking the words of God? Or was he just a self-made man? And in verse 5, they writhe and squirm like snakes.

And we're allowed in to hear what they deliberate on and they say, if we say John the Baptist came from heaven, Jesus is going to know we're liar, liar, liars. We didn't get his baptism.

If we say John the Baptist came from man, well, that'll make us massively unpopular. So instead, here the religious leaders of Israel opt and choose to look like fools.

And they say, we don't know. We're challenging you on your authority, but we're not competent to judge John the Baptist. We'll have to set up a commission. And it's wonderful.

It's wonderful that Luke, Jesus through Luke, exposes their real motive. It's fear of disapproval. See, every single one of us knows we're not really the owner of ourselves.

[9 : 45] And I think when it's exposed by the word of God, by the person of Jesus, we become pretty insecure. And so what happens is our religion, we have a choice.

Either our religion becomes a way that we impress others or we give it up. Either we let Christ justify us or we keep busily justifying ourselves and so I become frightened of your opinion of me and you become frightened of my opinion of you and we become slaves, frightened, fearful.

If you look at anyone on the treadmill of respectability and religious institutionalism, that's what's going on. Deep down, fear, insecurity. So that's false ownership.

Secondly, and now the heart of the passage, verses 9 to 19, true ownership. Lovely thing about this passage is often don't you find Jesus' parables leave us puzzling.

There are also developments of Jesus' parables and you think, I'm not sure what that means. This one is so obvious that at the end of it, in verse 19, even his enemies, second half of the verse, perceived that he had told this parable against them.

[11 : 08] this is probably the clearest of all Jesus' parables. And it is Jesus interpreting Jesus.

Jesus' parables, and he tells us who God is, who we are, and why he's come. And the way he does it is he goes back into the Old Testament and he takes a little story from Isaiah chapter 5, where God says, God pictures himself as the owner of a vineyard, who develops a vineyard and digs it and cares for it and cares for it and cares for it and wants fruit and nothing.

And in Isaiah 5, God says, what more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done, for the vineyard is the house of Israel. The men of Judah are its pleasant planting.

I look for justice, but behold, bloodshed. For righteousness, but behold, a cry. What Jesus does is he takes that story and twists it just a little, makes it a little more pointed and says actually the relationship between those who belong to God and God is of an owner and tenants.

And we're meant to give God fruit. And as soon as I say that, I think this is where our hostility kicks in. From beginning to end, the Bible assumes we are not our own.

[12 : 36] We did not make ourselves. We did not make the world. It's God who made us. It's God's vineyard. It's God's life. It's God's body. It's God's mind that you and I are using.

They're his. Your life, your abilities, your opportunities, they're a gift from God. And you and I are tenants and we owe to God everything.

It has huge implications. It means that we're accountable to God for everything he gives us. Just think about this. every time you use your mind creatively, you're using the resources of God.

I mean, whatever I do with my body, I'm actually using something that belongs to God. Belongs to me in a way too. It's on loan, perhaps. But everything I have, my real and imagined estate, is all from God.

My time, my finances, my sexuality. humanity. It's fundamentally God's. And what God does is he doesn't just start the show and say, it's all over to you.

[13 : 43] He constantly sends messengers to remind us that we are his tenants. So in the parable, the owner sends a servant to collect the fruit.

And what do the tenants do? They beat him and send him away empty. They resent the implication that they are not completely in control. Story should have finished there.

What should the owner do? He ought to move in, kick the tenants out. But he doesn't. He sends a second servant and this one they treat worse. What does the owner do? He sends a third and him they treat shamefully.

These are the tenants from hell. Then we come to this amazing moment in verse 13. Verse 13. It is a solemn moment where the owner deliberates with himself.

It's a little like the creation story when God stops and deliberates with himself. Verse 13. The owner of the vineyard says, what shall I do? I will send my beloved son.

[14 : 52] Maybe they will respect him. You see, any real owner would be fed up to the teeth with this. Any owner, any real owner would march in with every right, have these guys arrested and kicked out.

But this owner is different. This owner goes beyond what is humanly reasonable. Stretching our understanding of compassion and mercy and grace.

And if you step back for just a moment, this is the story of the scriptures. God sent to his people prophet after prophet after prophet. And what did his people do? They beat them.

They imprisoned them. Prisoned them. They killed them. And then they built their tombs and said, these are the prophets. There's great longing here, I think.

Hear the word of the father. He says, I'll send my beloved son. The same thing God called Jesus at his baptism. He longs, surely, he says, surely they'll realise that he represents me.

[16 : 04] And when the son comes in the parable, he meets vicious and deadly opposition precisely because he does represent God. And in a display of completely irrational logic, the tenants hatch this stupid plan as though by killing the son somehow they throw off the owner and that they then get the vignette.

So Jesus takes the parable and he asks two questions in application. The first question is in verse 15. Second half of verse 15.

He says, what would you do? What should the owner do? And then he puts a twist on it. He says, he'll get rid of the tenants and the vineyard will be given to others.

And suddenly he gets under the skin of the religious leaders and they call out verse 16, no way. You cannot say that.

They do not care one little iota when Jesus says that they have violated God's ownership. they don't care that Jesus knows and exposes the fact that they're plotting to kill him this very moment.

[17 : 24] What really gets them is that Jesus is saying the whole religious system on which they've built their status and security is going to be taken away from them and given to others.

The whole position of the builders of the religious system is going to be lost and that is the horror to them. The thing on which we've built our superiority and our identity is intolerable to them that God should take salvation and give it to others instead of them and how glad we are that God has done that so that we Gentiles might believe.

That's the first question and while they are reeling from this question God asks them a second question in verse 17. He goes back to Psalm Psalm 118 and he says this verse talks about the great stone the rock and the builders looked at the rock and they rejected it but that is the rock that God has chosen and even though the builders have rejected it and have started to build over here that is God's rock and everything that God builds is based on this rock and this rejected rock God takes it and puts it at the head of the corner and everything from now on is built around this rock so that all their busy building is nothing but just building.

Jesus is speaking about his death and his resurrection. In his death they utterly reject him and they think that by killing him it's going to be the end of it and they'll get their building back and they'll get their institution back but God will raise Jesus from the dead and God will exalt Jesus to the highest place and now all God does through the world and for eternity is built on Jesus Christ and the most catastrophic decision any person can make is to reject Jesus.

But there's a little more here. There's something very remarkable about this text and the use of it and I want to just stand on it for just a moment because when the early church started preaching the gospel in the book of Acts this was the text they went back to over and over again.

[19 : 53] Here is the amazing thing about it. Yes they are going to kill Jesus but the very wickedness that they are planning to do is the thing through which God's glory and grace and forgiveness are shown.

In other words all our hostility to God all its fruit even the greatest wickedness our very attempt to throw God off as the owner and having Jesus put to death is the very means by which God opens the door of salvation and forgiveness to each of us.

Isn't that amazing? In the death and resurrection of Jesus our hostility to God meets the grace and glory and power of the eternal God and what that means is that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ God owns us not once but twice.

He owned us once as creator he now owns us again as our redeemer and even though we resent the fact that God owns us we gradually get used to it and even though we replace God with ourselves and we say to ourselves I own myself I own myself I own myself and even though that leads to the murder of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection God buys us back and we come back to him a second time and that's true ownership.

So let me look just briefly at the third episode double ownership and we come to this very famous story of tax to Caesar verses 19 to 26. Now at verse 19 they should have bowed down and asked for forgiveness shouldn't they?

[21 : 34] But in verse 20 what do they do? They mount a covert surveillance operation. It's very interesting. You see verse 20 these guys who pretend spies who pretend to be sincere.

In the Greek they hypocrite themselves to be righteous. Luke won't let that go. And so in verse 21 they come up to Jesus and they flatter him and they butter him up and they say is it lawful, is it lawful by the law of God to give tribute to Caesar?

They are very pleased with themselves by this question. It is a very clever question. It puts Jesus on the knife edge of a dilemma. You see the tax to Caesar was incredibly unpopular.

It's just a small amount. Everyone had to pay it and incidentally it went through the hands of the Sanhedrin. These very guys handled the money and took their cut from it.

But even having to pay that little coin it irked because it said we're still under Roman occupation and everyone hated it. The popular answer would be to say don't pay it to Caesar.

[22 : 44] But if Jesus says don't pay it to Caesar they've got him, they'll arrest him and send him to the authorities. And if he says pay it to Caesar Jesus will lose his popular support and they'll still arrest him anyway.

So Jesus gives this brilliant answer which you're very familiar with and Eric reminded us. He takes a coin and he says whose image and inscription, literally whose icon and epigraph are on the coin.

It's all a matter of ownership Jesus is saying. The coin really belongs to God. He minted them, he created them and the proof is it's got his image on it.

So when Caesar asks for one back you've got to give it back. And the word render in verse 25 means give back.

It's not give, it's give back something that was his in the first place. Then Jesus steps back and he says but there's a much more important point here. God is the owner of every person, Caesar included.

[23 : 53] God owns us, he made us and the proof of that is that you bear his image and I bear his image. Jesus is saying you can't compartmentalise your life. You can't have money over here and real estate over here and fashion over here and God over here.

God owns it all. Nor can you divide your life into two spheres and have a religious sphere, you know church and prayer and hymn singing and stuff over there whereas the rest is mine.

I'm going to decide how to deal with my money and my media and my merchandise. The whole thing belongs to God in the first place. It's all on loan from him. And if you have to give back coins occasionally to Caesar, Jesus now says you have to give it all back to God.

You need to give you back to God. I think that's just remarkable. So let me finish.

As I've been thinking about this, I think the image of hands is very helpful to us. If God is my owner, it means that underneath my life is the hand of God which I can rest on.

[25 : 15] And if I rest on his hand, it means I can hold everything in my life with an open hand. But if that hand of God, if I pretend the hand of God is not there, I'm going to grip everything very tightly.

The three idols in this passage are the same three idols Jesus has been working on since chapter 12, religion and money and the approval of others. If I don't believe that God's hand is underneath me as owner, I'm going to grab hold of my money, I hold it very tightly, I'm going to hold your approval very tightly or I hold myself as the owner very tightly.

But if God's hand is underneath me, it's a great relief. And the only way to hold things with a loose hand is to know not just that God owns me, but that the hand underneath me is good, it's good, it's good.

He is the one, even though I've treated him shabbily as a tenant, even though I've tried to act as God, he sends me messages and messengers and messengers and even though I treat the messengers shabbily, he sends his son and even after we crucify him, God raises him from the dead undoing our wickedness, buying us back for the second time through the resurrection, puts Jesus as the head of all things and says now come build on him, be built into the spiritual house, not just in this life but in the life to come.

It's a very different gospel than the one you hear from Oprah. You are not your owner. God is our owner and he calls us to give ourselves back to him and I think that's very good news.

[27 : 02] Shall we kneel and pray? Father God, we come before you this morning and we acknowledge that we are yours.

Forgive us, Lord, for the times that we get caught up in structures and programs and our own agendas and they displace you.

Help us, Father God, to know Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. We acknowledge that you are our true owner, our creator and our redeemer.

We acknowledge that we belong to you and we commit our lives to you and we give you our praise and our glory for you are worthy of all praise and glory and majesty and honor.

Lord, in your mercy. Father God, this morning we want to pray for the diocese of the upper Shira as they consecrate their new bishop, Brighton Molasa.

[28 : 22] Lord, we ask for spiritual protection for him. We pray that you would draw close to him, guide him in his decisions and actions.

We pray that he would always keep you as his center, that he would always know, remember that he is your servant.

And we pray that you would anoint him with your Holy Spirit for the job that you have called him to. Lord, in your mercy. Amen. Father God, we pray for the people who are affected by the fires in the interior of BC.

We pray for your hand to be upon them, for your protection on the firefighters. Lord, in your mercy. Lord God, we would also lift before you some of the missionaries that we support as a parish.

Particularly this morning we lift before you Paul Ratsoy of the Lighthouse Ministries. We pray that they would have open access to the ships that come into our harbors from all over the world.

[29 : 46] We pray that they would have opportunities to share your gospel with the sailors. And that you would lead them to sailors whose hearts are open to you.

That they could come to know to whom they truly belong. We also pray for Mary and Maxwell of Genesis House. Lord, we pray for that outreach to needy women of this city.

We pray that you would bring a woman with babies into their program. Pray that you would draw the right woman there.

Lord, we pray for Annalise who's broken her collarbone and pray for your healing upon her. And we ask also for Mary and Lord that you would give her strength to deal with what are sometimes very difficult people to deal with.

And Lord, we also lift before you Dan and Fran Gao of the Seeds of Hope. Lord, in your mercy. Lord God, we want to lift before you the Sudanese congregation.

[31 : 02] We pray for Emmanuel, that he would be filled with your spirit and led by you as he seeks to shepherd and preach to the Sudanese of Vancouver.

And we pray that that congregation would be united under the gospel of Jesus Christ. Lord, in your mercy. Amen. Amen. Amen. We also pray for the ongoing trial that we're involved in right now.

Lord, we thank you that your hand is under us, that we do not need to clutch or cling, but that we can trust in you, for we are yours.

And Lord, we commit ourselves ourselves and our church to you, knowing that it is not really our church, but yours.

We are not our own, but we are yours. And so we pray that your will would be done. We pray for the lawyers as they present their final arguments this coming week.

[32 : 07] Give them wisdom, Lord. Give them your words to speak. We pray for Judge Kelleher as he weighs the testimony. May he, Lord, may he be careful and deliberate and give him the courage to make the right decision.

We commit ourselves in this to you, O Lord. Lord, in your mercy. Amen. Father God, we pray for the people in this parish who are in need, for George, Ruina, Velva, Ron, Ben, and Harold.

And Lord, in the silence of our hearts, we also lift before you those known to ourselves. Amen. Lord, in your mercy.

Now, to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, blameless with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, be for all time, and now, and forever.

Amen.