

Luke 20:9-18 "Rejecting or Embracing Jesus"

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- [0 : 0 0] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- We're back in Luke this morning. Luke 20. Headed down the homestretch. Our final semester together in Luke's Gospel.
- So let me remind you where we've been as we get back into it here. Luke is writing this historical account to focus us on the real, true Jesus.
- He wants us to know what Jesus is really like. Who He really is. What He really says. Because nothing else could be more important than that.
- It's like the words of Vince Lombardi that we've remembered often in this series. He always started every year with, ladies and gentlemen, this is a football.
- [1 : 0 2] If you don't focus on this, nothing else matters. This is where you've got to focus. I want to acknowledge it's a little bit of a funny morning for me to bring a football up here.
- Especially one with a tiger paw on it. That's what I had. And I do plan to watch and enjoy the game tomorrow night.
- But I want to say something really serious. Eternity is not hinging on tomorrow night's game.
- Or any other game. You know, it's really actually not that big of a deal. It doesn't matter ultimately what happens there.
- The battle on that field pales in comparison to the spiritual warfare in which we are all engaged for the souls, eternal souls of men and women and children that we know and love and are precious to God.
- [2 : 0 9] It's for the glory of Jesus, our King. This week has driven that home for me. That that's what really matters. Luke's been telling us that over and over, right?
- Jesus has been getting clearer and clearer. Eternity is at stake. We must focus on Him. Knowing Him. Walking with Him.
- Investing in the extension of His kingdom. Ron said it so helpfully last week, didn't he? There's one thing. One thing.
- One thing of greatest value that has real substance, that really matters, and that's knowing God. If we're together going to know Him more this year and get a fuller glimpse of His glory, that happens as we look at Jesus.
- Jesus, the one where we see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The one whom to know is life itself, whose glory and grace so overwhelms us and pours into us that it overflows from us to everyone around us.
- [3 : 2 7] The one we so look forward to being with forever, that we want everyone around us to be with us, with Him forever, right? There's no football game like that.

He's the main thing. As always, when we walk into a new year, we want to keep the main thing the main thing. And if Jesus is the main thing, if He's the football that we must focus on, then we've got a great opportunity before us because these last five chapters of Luke's Gospel are the tip, the point of the football.

Luke slows down and spends actually 20% of his whole historical account of Jesus on one week in Jesus' life.

He's zooming in as Jesus enters Jerusalem, the place He's been journeying towards this whole time for the purpose for which He was born in the manger, to come and suffer and die on a cross and rise from the dead for His people.

Isn't this what has been on Jesus' heart as the most important thing of all over and over? Isn't this what He's been telling us time and again that we need to focus on for the sake of eternity?

[4 : 50] He's about to show us the one we need to know, our God and all of His authoritative, humble, sacrificial, self-giving, upside-down, triumphant glory.

He's going to do that in this next week. Hasn't Jesus been focusing our attention on who He is and why He's come, warning us repeatedly not to miss it?

He's actually going to do that again today. Remember, Jesus has just arrived in the city of God to the cheers of many, wept over the people of God to the surprise of many, cleaned out the temple of God to the shock of many.

That's where we were just before this. And now it's Tuesday. Good Friday is three days away. It's Tuesday in that week and Jesus will teach us about vital, eternal matters.

Let's pray and then we'll read this passage together. Jesus, there are so many things that vie for our attention, for the affection of our hearts.

[6 : 18] None of them is worthy as you are. Nothing else even compares. There is no one like you and so would you show yourself to us clearly again this morning that we might see you.

We might love you. That we might rejoice and find life in you. We ask it in your name. Amen. Luke 20 at verse 9.

And Jesus began to tell the people this parable. A man planted a vineyard and led it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while.

When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

And he sent another servant, but they also beat and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent yet a third, this one also they wounded and cast out. And the owner of the vineyard said, What shall I do?

[7 : 28] I will send my beloved son. Perhaps they will respect him. But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, This is the heir.

Let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours. And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

And when they heard this, they said, Surely not! But he looked directly at them and said, What then is this that is written, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. Thus far, God's holy word.

It was a long introduction. Sermon not quite as long, I promise. But nonetheless, vitally important for our hearts.

[8 : 35] That's why Jesus tells us this parable. Here's a simple outline for you, since what you see on the back of your bulletin is where the sermon was when we printed the bulletins.

What? And so what? I want us briefly to make sure we understand what the parable itself means, and then spend a few minutes asking, So what?

Applying it to our hearts. So first, the explanation. It's not super complicated. You'll notice right away, in fact, in the next verse after Jesus finishes, that the religious leaders in Jerusalem understand what Jesus is saying, that he's talking about them.

They don't like it, but they know what he means. That's because Jesus uses an image, perhaps unfamiliar to you, but very familiar to those who knew their Old Testaments.

God regularly refers to his people Israel as a vineyard. And the tenants that we meet in verse 9 are those leading his people, stewarding, caring for God's people on his behalf.

[9 : 52] Remember this special relationship with his people all the way back to Adam, and Abraham. God has created and called people to live in relationship with him.

To reflect his image in his world. And that as he pours his blessing, his grace into their lives, they're transformed and they share it with others so that the nations know the one true God.

And as they do, his glory fills the earth. Right? Israel is to be God's people for this purpose.

When he brings them out of Egypt, he plants a vineyard, so to speak, from which he hopes to bear fruit. Justice, righteousness, grace to the nations.

But Israel repeatedly seems a lot more interested in something else. Interested in itself rather than God.

[10 : 53] Pursuing other gods, right? Living after its own designs. Pursuing its own glory among the nations. Certainly not often wanting to bless other nations.

The prophet Isaiah says it this way in chapter 5. For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting.

That metaphor that God uses for that relationship of him as the owner and his people as the vineyard. And he comes, he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed.

For righteousness, but behold, an outcry. Israel is God's vineyard, but the fruits are not the fruits God desires over and over.

Not justice in relationships and care for the poor and outsider as God does, but bloodshed. Not righteousness and following God's law and being a blessing to others through that, but an outcry.

[12 : 03] Over and over, God finds this from his people, but he is patient with them. He sends one prophet after another, doesn't he? That's why the Old Testament gets so long, right?

Prophet after prophet after prophet. This is what Jesus describes in verse 10. The time came and the owner sent a servant to the tenants so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard.

But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but they also beat and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent yet a third.

This one also they wounded and cast out. God sends prophets who speak his word. They call his people back to relationship, to their first love, to Yahweh himself.

Back to his covenant love. Back to his covenant law. Part of which we read earlier. In other words, prophets come and they're seeking for God the fruit he desires from his people.

[13 : 13] But they are repeatedly rejected. Sent away without that fruit being realized. Israel, her judges, priests, kings, others, they ignore one prophet after another and they want the fruit of the vineyard, so to speak, all for themselves.

Their prestige among the nations. They want to be great. Their comfortable way of living. Their pleasures and riches the way they want to have them over God's priorities.

They've even turned, we just read last passage, God's temple. Meant to be, it says, a house of prayer for all people. A place the nations come and call on Yahweh and meet Him and find Him to be sufficient.

They've turned it into a place where the nations are kept distant. And when they do come around, they're used to line the pockets of the powerful in Jerusalem. No. See, over and over again, they reject God's Word and God's priorities in favor of their own.

And eventually, that culminates in rejecting God Himself. In rejecting the prophets, they reject God's invitation to fulfill the purpose He created and redeemed them for.

[14 : 35] They reject God Himself, their special relationship with Him. And that's always the way it is, right? Whether it's a parent, a teacher, a leader, whoever it is, that's the pattern set in rejecting someone's direction, in rejecting someone's priorities, you are rejecting that person Himself, aren't you?

If you don't value their words, you don't value their authority, their values don't mean anything to you, you don't value them. Sure enough, that's the next step for the leaders of God's people.

It's playing out right before our eyes in Luke, isn't it? Verse 13, Jesus tells them what's happening. The owner of the vineyard says, what shall I do?

I know, I will send my beloved son. Perhaps they will respect him. Long-suffering Yahweh sends prophet after prophet to no avail, but rather than giving up, he sends his son.

There's no question Jesus is talking about himself here. He uses the same phrase, my beloved son that's spoken from heaven at his baptism. He's the one sent.

[15 : 55] In fact, it's interesting, a good reminder to us of Jesus' awareness of his divine identity, of the reality of the Trinity, even though he never uses that word, he knows himself to be the son sent by the Father, the true heir.

But, when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, this is the heir, let us kill him so that the inheritance may be ours.

And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. In their ultimate act of self-assertion and God-rejection, they will kill God's son.

In their effort to solidify their control, to bear fruit for themselves what they want rather than for God what he wants, an example of them using people meant for God's glory for their own promotion, they will reject God's promised Messiah King.

What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

[17 : 13] Jesus warns them that they do this at their own peril. That those who reject him, God himself will reject. That ultimately the people of God, the true Israel, will be led by and composed of Gentiles.

All the religious leaders and those who follow them in their rejection of the Messiah face destruction. It's not hidden, is it?

It's a direct challenge and warning to align with the true King and His God-centered purposes or face destruction. See, it means what you thought.

It's what the parable's about and the leaders heard it clearly. So what? How about application? I mean, this is going to be hard.

We don't ever reject Jesus, do we? We're in church. We don't ever live for our own glory other than God's, do we?

[18 : 19] I thought this week, is there any description more true of the idolatry of our own age, of our own culture, of even our own church at times, than that we live for ourselves rather than for God?

oftentimes we're proud of it. It's often very obvious. Have it your way right away. The consumer mentality, it's all about you.

The sidelining of clear biblical teaching and meaningful involvement in the church community of God's people in favor of self-help, celebrity advice, regular Netflix or blog binging in order to get what I need.

Or the fact that what really grieves or upsets us, what really gets at the core of who we are is often not injustice and unrighteousness and the unbelief of our friends and neighbors or the nations.

More often than those grieving our hearts, our own discomfort upsets us. A bad call in a football game. A disruption to my schedule.

[19 : 39] Sometimes it's really obvious. But often this living for ourselves rather than bearing fruit for God is more subtle than that.

I'll tell you a little bit about my own heart this week. This week there were several unplanned, undesired, life events and Southwood staff members, Southwood congregation members, all seemed to happen at the same time and unravel together.

My head was spinning. My heart was overwhelmed in many ways. And I wish that what overwhelmed my heart was this sense of what God was doing and cries of God.

How can you be honored in the midst of these things? And God, what are you teaching this family and what are you teaching me in even this hard place? Or God, please, please bring fruit for your glory in this situation.

Whatever happens to me, I'll wait on you. I wish that's what was overwhelming my heart. I wish that was all I felt. Instead, right there in my heart were other desires, other questions.

[21 : 05] Questions like, how am I going to come out looking to them in this? Impressive, I hope? Pastoral? How can I restore order to my life today?

It wasn't supposed to be like this. How does all this reflect on my leadership? I wonder if I'm handling it right. Selfish, ugly, but true.

I'm really thankful for godly pastors and staff members and elders who helped me. They helped me repent, see things through the lens of God's glory.

Say, hey, he's at work. More than once, help me stop fighting for myself and sit down and pray for God's direction.

See, we can make anything about ourselves, can't we? We're really good at that. The applications here are for all of us, but they are especially poignant for those of us called to lead God's people in any capacity.

[22 : 16] Do we use our calling among God's people to pursue our own comfort, power, or prestige? Do we pursue ideas that we want to see happen because it's my family's preference?

Or are we passionately pursuing God's glory, focusing on His word and His priorities, pushing ourselves and others to exalt and embrace Jesus because that's what really matters?

Elders, deacons, ministry teams, leadership teams, small group leaders, church.

This church is God's vineyard. He's the owner. Are you bearing fruit for yourself or for Him?

If you're not sure, I found it to be a pretty good barometer of how you're doing with that, how often you're crying out to God on behalf of your people.

[23 : 27] His people. How often you're coming to Him in deep concern for their souls, desperate for them to embrace Jesus, not just you.

If we ever find ourselves avoiding His word and His priorities, we will find ourselves and our people ultimately rejecting Him. and that's true not just for church leaders.

See, those same issues apply to all of us in every relationship God gives us and in some ways all of us who know Jesus are leaders in His church and in other relationships.

What are the vineyards where God has placed you? Are you using someone else for yourself or seeking fruit for God?

Particularly, think of relationships where God has given you some spiritual stewardship of others. This brings us to the vineyard of kids.

[24 : 41] Hmm. One where it is so easy to reject God's priorities. To be seeking honor for yourself. What a smart kid.

What an athletic kid you have. The respect of others. Oh, you're such a good parent. Doesn't that feel good to hear every once in a while? When actually the fruit God seeks is children with a love for Jesus, with hearts that love God's word and lives shaped by His priorities, that's the fruit God's looking for in that vineyard.

Now parents, hear me, it's not all up to you. That's not what I'm saying. But is that fruit what you long for? Is that the fruit you invest in?

Is that the fruit you're praying for? How about at the office? A great place to seek your own success and comfort and not have to worry about anybody else?

To overlook the hurting employee? To overlook the unbelieving co-worker? The kingdom opportunity in your office?

[26 : 04] I hesitate even to say how about your marriage? A vineyard where we often approach our spouses primarily there for our pleasure?

For our fulfillment? For our benefit? When God has designed us to seek each other's spiritual good, not our own, at great cost to ourselves and our own comfort even.

Husbands, I'm talking to us in particular in case you didn't notice. In case that was unclear. Do you pray for your spouse?

You push them to embrace Jesus in every situation? Do you talk together? Do you initiate those conversations about a marriage that's for the glory of the king rather than merely what are some of the things we want together?

You begin to see how easy it can be to reject Jesus and sit in pews and stand behind pulpits? when we neglect his word, when we ignore his priorities, we ultimately reject him.

[27 : 19] We all heard the reading of God's law this morning. It's not a list of do's and don'ts as Ron said. It's a reflection of his heart, of his glorious character that he calls us to in relationship with him.

Does it shape your life? Does it energize your heart? Is it what you're about? Do you long to live in fruitful relationship with him more and more? Jesus is warning us here.

It's what this parable is. It's a warning, not just to get us, but so that we will see the danger in rejecting him and turn back instead to embrace him more fully.

It ultimately comes down to that, doesn't it? when the vineyard owner finally sends his beloved son. Jesus the son warns us that if we don't receive him, prophet after prophet came, but God again sent his son, and if we don't receive him, we will be destroyed.

And the religious people say to that message, what? Surely not! No way! I will hear it, but I won't believe it.

[28 : 45] They could not imagine that they were in church, that they were pretty good people, and that God would reject them in favor of some Gentiles.

Verse 17, he looked directly at them and said, what then is this that is written, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. Jesus quotes from the psalm that many just sang to him a couple days ago, blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

Do you remember that? Psalm 118? They're saying, you're the Messiah, and Jesus quotes and says, you're right I am. Let's be clear on that. The picture he gives with the stone is of builders gathering stones for a building they're about to start, and they find one that's oddly shaped and doesn't appeal to them, and they discard it into the rubble pile, only to work long and hard on this building and get to the end and find they're missing one key piece that has this unique shape and it looks just like the, but they already rejected that one, threw it out, and he looked them in the eye and made the warning so clear, don't miss the Messiah, the corner stone.

He's a stone that will crush you if you reject him, whatever you think you're building in your life will ultimately crumble without him. You can't just ignore him and do your best to live a pretty good life and be a decent guy and expect things to work out okay.

[30 : 43] No, he says, it's not how it works. Destruction comes. We must hear that warning.

It's a warning that is laced with glorious hope. The one speaking, the warning, is the stone rejected that is also the cornerstone.

The one who although rejected and killed will even through that be vindicated for those who embrace him. Isn't that incredible? Isn't the love of Jesus amazing?

He's the ultimate example of God's patience with failing people. He's about to go to the cross for those who reject him already.

For those who will send him there. Who have already said we don't want anything to do with you. And he goes to the cross so there can be forgiveness for that rejection.

[31 : 47] An invitation even in your rejection of him to embrace him afresh today. He comes and goes to the cross for that so that there's an offer of hope to you this morning.

Great British preacher Charles Spurgeon describes this amazing love of Jesus beautifully. If you reject him he answers you with tears.

If you wound him he bleeds out cleansing. If you kill him he dies to redeem. If you bury him he rises again to bring resurrection.

Jesus is love made manifest. Love made manifest to us. How could we ignore this Jesus?

Why would we reject him and think it's actually better for us to build something for ourselves that is apart from his gracious heart? How could we think we'd build something better?

[32 : 56] What could this community be like if we together pushed each other to embrace him and exalt him in every relationship we have in every conversation every day?

Let's pray and ask him to do that. Father, by the Holy Spirit, would you create that in this place?

Would you take self-centered pastors and leaders and congregation members and make them those who long for your glory?

Who long to embrace Jesus no matter what else comes? And we find great joy and life in worshiping him themselves and sharing of his glory with others.

Father, you made us for that. Now would you remake us, cleanse our hearts, renew us, even this year in our love for our Savior.

[34 : 02] We ask it in his name. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.