



“Jesus Warns Wicked Tenants”

Luke 20:9-18

March 8, 2020

It is good to be together this morning. We enter once again into the Gospel of Luke, being in Luke Chapter 20. Please join me there.

We have a parable set before us this morning about the worst tenants that anybody could ever dread having on their property. I am not talking about a bunch of reckless party animals who totally deface and damage some home in the suburbs they are renting. Instead, I am talking about people severely restrained, perhaps even moralistic in their behavior.

Neither am I talking about people who are basically a bunch of lazy gluttons who refuse to ever lift a finger to maintain or even keep clean the property that they are renting. Instead, I am talking about some of the most diligent and immaculate people that you could ever imagine interacting with.

This morning’s parable given to us by Christ was first and foremost about some of the people of Israel, especially the religious leadership of Israel at the time of His coming, and the people of Israel in general who could not seem to stop resisting and stiffening their necks against the authority of the Living God, even to the point of hostility and violence toward the messengers that God sent them to call them back to His ways, even though He sent them time and time again.

This morning we have the so-called *Parable of the Wicked Tenants* delivered by King Jesus Himself. This is an historical parable, telling the story of God’s relationship with Israel over approximately a thirteen-hundred-year stretch.

It began at the time just after the exodus when God placed them in the land of Canaan, a land that was flowing with milk and honey, and leading all the way up to the coming of the Christ. J.C. Ryle said of this parable, *The history of Israel is here in a glass placed before us to see*. And in it we see the ongoing saga of God’s turbulent relationship with His chosen nation.

While that is its primary reference, this parable also pertains to us all. Are not all of us human beings cut from the same fabric? As we dig into this portion of text which does deal in fact with Israel, we must remember and recall what Paul said about the entire human race in Romans Chapter 3 and Verses 9 and 10

⁹What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, ¹⁰as it is written:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

So even as we read this parable that pertains first to Israel, we must understand that here in this text, Jesus the Messiah was opening our understanding to what it is like for God to deal with rebellious, sinful people—people like you and me.

We see this laid out before us here in this parable. So, we Gentiles way out here in Southern California, we sit humbly under the teaching of Jesus Christ as well, saying, *Speak into my heart. Reveal Yourself to me. Make myself known to me as well, and bring me into Your ways by the power of Your grace and the working of Your Spirit.*

Let me remind you that here in Luke Chapter 20, it was Tuesday of the Holy Week. It was the days leading into the great Passover festival, in the very courts of the holy temple in Jerusalem. Let me also remind you that it was a week of increasing hostility against the Lord Jesus Christ by the Jewish leadership.

At that point, the Sanhedrin, the ruling counsel, they were plotting the death of the Christ, the Messiah. By Friday of that week, Jesus would be crucified. Jesus knowing all these things were at work, gave this parable of warning and judgment. He depicted what they were planning against Him, against the backdrop of their history as a nation.

Let's see what Jesus told in this *Parable of the Wicked Tenants*. Luke Chapter 20 beginning in Verse 9:

⁹And he began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. ¹⁰When 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. ¹¹And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. ¹²And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. ¹³Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ ¹⁴But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’ ¹⁵And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “Surely not!” ¹⁷But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written: “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone”?

¹⁸Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”

¹⁹The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people.

Once again, what we have laid before us is a historical parable depicting the saga of God's turbulent relationship with the nation of Israel. Here in this portion of Scripture, we want to see the Lord and to see Him clearly. We want to see ourselves as well in what was written, as recorded from the words of Christ in this parable.

I want to let you know that in Christian theology there are various subcategories, different particular areas of doctrine and research and understanding. There is within Christian systematic theology something called Christology, the study of the Christ.

There is also something called pneumatology, *pneumas* being the Greek word for spirit. Pneumatology being the study of the Holy Spirit. Finally, there is also something called Theology Proper. This is a study of God and His attributes with a particular focus on God the Father.

Here in this parable I think there is the portrayal of God the Father that we need to see and take to heart as we come to understand how He has dealt with Israel and how He, by extension, has dealt with the human race as well. There is a picture of the Father here and I would pray that we would even see how He has dealt with us as we see what is written for us here in this text.

As we take a closer look at this parable for our edification and growth in Christ, I want us to focus this time by noticing three attributes of God in this parable. First we will see His goodness. Then we will see His patience, and, yes, we are also going to see His wrath in this parable.

First, let's see how this parable depicts:

1. The Goodness of God (Luke 20:9)

We see this at the very beginning of this passage. Notice in Verse 9 where we see God the Father depicted as one who planted a vineyard. Verse 9:

⁹And he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while.

Notice that a vineyard was being planted. The one who planted it was personally involved. He planted that place where he expected many, many grapes to grow with many, many vivacious and colorful clusters.

So we can picture this man that had searched out a fertile portion of land. He was personally involved. He cleared that land of rocks and stones. He had dug the land and cultivated the soil, and he planted the vineyard. That man built trellises for the vines to grow across.

We would also understand that with the investment in this vineyard he would have placed a hedge around it for protection. He would have built a tower to watch out for any predators, or any of the thieves that might come in.

He provided a system of irrigation. He provided a wine press for the treading of the grapes in order to produce wine. He provided all of these things, and this depicts God's personal hand in creating and providing for Israel and their fruitfulness.

I was reading this and I was reminded of a godly brother in the Lord, who used to be a part of Bethel Grace Baptist Church. Maybe he still is a part of Bethel Grace, but he is in the heavenly community now. He has graduated. He is a man of God who went to go be with God.

His name was Dick Fargusun. Dick was a tall and slender, white-haired man who was kind of a tough man. Whenever Dick would come up and shake my hand, I would have to count on not using that hand for several hours, because he had such a strong grip!

Dick also had a passion for gardening. He was here all through the week. He invested in this church so that it was blossoming with color everywhere. There were flower pots and planters all around. He pruned and trimmed all week long, personally involved to make our campus so colorful and pleasing. I read this parable, and it reminded me of that.

Here we see that the Lord was at work investing in Israel, doing all that He did to make it so that they could be prolific. And what was God's desire in showering His goodness upon the people of Israel in the ways that He did by providing for them so lavishly?

His desire was that they would be a fruitful nation, that the fruit of love would be experienced throughout their community. And so that they would also have worship rising up to the Lord, and so that they would also have a heart for the nations around them; that they would be attractive to the nations around them; that they would even venture out into those nations to tell them to turn from the darkness of idolatry and come and see the Living God.

The Lord invested in them. Historically He called them His vineyard, desiring them to bear this kind of fruit. In it we see this picture of the goodness of the Lord as we think about the ways that He provided for Israel. Brothers and sisters in Christ, has not the Lord provided for us so abundantly as well? Has not God been good to us?

Don't we just have so much? Just look at the physical resources we have for the church at large. But also zoom in closer. How about the church in southeast Bellflower, right here at Bethel Grace. We have so much at the physical level, we have this wonderful property that together we own as a church family—now it's God's, but on the human level, as a church we own it together.

We have so many physical resources, and we have wealth that can be invested in so many different ways. It is all from the hand of God. He has been so good to us, but what about the spiritual resources we have even more. He has given us the presence of His Spirit. He has given His Word.

Do you know that God has given us more knowledge and more resources for study and understanding than any First Century Pharisee could have dreamed of? There is so much opportunity for us to dig deep and know the Lord, with all the resources He has given to us.

Brothers and sisters, why has He provided for us in these ways? First of all, He is just good. He is good. We are His sons and daughters and He loves us and He cares for us. And He desires that our lives be fruitful. He desires that we abide in Christ; that, by His grace and His Spirit flowing in and through us, what is taught in John Chapter 15, as we remain connected to the vine is that He will bear fruit in our lives—the fruit of character. You read about those qualities of the Holy Spirit in Galatians Chapter 5 and Verses 22 and 23. The fruit of the Spirit which starts with love, then it blossoms out in so many different ways.

God desires to bear the fruit of reproduction in our lives. That people would come and be introduced to the Lord and that they would grow in Him. Take a moment with the Lord now: how is He calling you to bear fruit that others might benefit? Reproduction is the fruit. How is Christ being brought to others through you? Who does God want you to invest in? Who has God placed in your life? Think about it.

Think about people who don't know Jesus. Think about people who do know Jesus that need to grow in Him. Where does God want you to invest personally with people? This is the fruitfulness of the Christian life, and He has been good to us, desiring that we are prolific by His work through us. Be thinking about those things before the Lord. We all must go back to the Lord, saying, *Here I am. Help me to see who You want me to have influence on for Jesus?*

We see the goodness of the Lord. That is a lot out of Verse 9, but it is there. It is there! We continue and now see another attribute of God that is depicted for us as we see this parable. We also see:

2. The Patience of God (Luke 20:10-13)

We see this when we go into Verses 10 through 13. We see His patience and by His patience I am talking about His willingness to suffer long with sinful people as He sends truth into their lives and they keep resisting the truths that He sends. We see that depicted here.

Now, this parable is based on that very common practice in the ancient world that is still common today in many places. That common practice is called *sharecropping*. Wealthy land owners would either purchase or build estates in these agrarian societies. Then they would bring tenants on to the property.

A lot of the time those tenants would be allowed to live in those structures for free. They would be provided for by the owner of the property. Their responsibility was to work the land and produce the fruit that the vineyard was intended to produce.

It would help to expand the estate of the property owner as the fruit was produced and brought to market. But those who worked the vineyard got to live there for free. They just did the work that needed to be done. Then they would give the portions of crops back to the owner.

That is the backdrop that is in our text. So the time came when the owner was asking where the fruit of the vineyard was. We see what happened as this all unfolded. Starting in Verse 10:

¹⁰When 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.

What?!? That's not what we expected at all. Looking to get some samples of the fruit, the owner sent his servant to vineyard, but instead of being sent back with a cart full of fruit, the servant was sent back with a face full of bruises. They got violent with him.

So the owner said that there may have been some kind of misunderstanding. We continue, Verse 11:

¹¹And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed.

This time they added insult to injury. The servant came telling them that he was there to bring the owner the fruit that he was expecting from his property. Instead of giving the servant fruit, they hit him or maybe trimmed his beard, which, in that context, was doing things to insult a man. They were responding with hostility.

Then it says in Verse 12:

¹²And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. ¹³Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.

I don't know how you respond to what is laid out before us here but I read this and thought to myself, *What is the owner doing? Why did he keep sending these servants? The second one, perhaps okay, but then the third one?*

Now he was going to send his son. My response is: don't send your son. Instead of sending your son, send a big giant open can of whoop down. And yes, I know the actual expression is more colorful than what I just used, but you get the point! I wonder what he was doing in sending his son!

I think that that is the point. Jesus was trying to get across to us how patient and longsuffering God is with people in this world. Instead of giving them the immediate judgment due their deeds, He kept sending truth to them to try to get them in line with what is good and how they are supposed to be. We see this laid out for us in the text.

Brothers and sisters, understand this world is filled with people having the same attitude toward God as we see found in these tenants here. The tenants, they became greedy and stingy and entitled and selfish. They did not think that they owed the owner anything and they had become a bunch of violent rebels. We see later on that they got the idea that the inheritance was theirs.

Likewise, there are people everywhere throughout the world, they live this life on God's green earth, breathing the air that He supplies, working all the resources that His hands gives, and they don't think they owe anyone anything and there is no fear of the Living God in their lives. Their attitude is that it is my life. It is my money. It is my property. It is my wages. It is my everything, and I will do with it what I want. There is no fear of the Creator and Provider in their eyes.

This is inherent to the fallen human condition. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we better understand that apart from the work of the Holy Spirit revealing our sin and the transforming power of the Christ to turn us from sin to God, this is us. As followers of Jesus Christ, there is the residue of this that can still continue on in us.

We need to be praying constantly, *Lord, change my heart. By the work of Your Spirit, make it so that my heart is grateful to You and that all that You provide, and that my hands are generous and active in the deeds You want me to do, and the grace You want me to give.*

First and foremost, this parable depicts God persistently sending His prophets to preach to Israel, reminding them of all that He had done for them historically; all of the favors they enjoyed from Him; all the privileges from God that they had received.

The prophets went back again and again to call Israel to humility and repentance; to live the fruitful lives that God had been calling them to live, and to live with spiritual, relational, and missional vitality. Yet, they kept resisting and beating up the prophets that God sent.

They kept doing this all the way up to where they were casting doubt upon John the Baptist, the forerunner to the Christ—all the way up to the point when the Christ came. It happened repeatedly.

Praise God, there were some throughout the history of Israel who worshiped the Lord. But the ongoing saga proved that there was rebellion after rebellion after rebellion after rebellion. And perhaps it was at its lowest point when King Jesus came.

We see that here in this text as we continue, as we see before us the final picture of:

3. The Wrath of God (Luke 20:14-16a)

By wrath, I mean God's careful measured judgment upon sin that goes unrepentant of. Let's see this as we continue reading Verses 13 through 16:

¹³Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him. ¹⁴But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' ¹⁵And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.

There are many passages in the Bible that speak to us about the death of Jesus Christ. This is one of those passages in parable form. But this passage does not so much speak of the atoning value of the death of Christ, that which is spoken of all throughout the pages of Scripture. The New Testament is absolutely rich with the language of the atonement that Jesus provided in His death. However, this portion of Scripture speaks to us of the moral culpability of the people who put Him to death with murder in their hearts.

As we look in the pages of Scripture, the death of Jesus Christ is presented to us in the Bible on two levels. On the one hand, it is something that human beings carried out with malice and hatred in their own hearts. There were human beings who murdered the Son of God. It was the religious leadership as we will be reading in the pages ahead of us in the Gospel of Luke.

It was the religious leadership of Israel that fueled this murder. They used the compliance of the Romans to get it done. Then there were Romans who participated in the scorn and in the hatred as well. They did it with hatred. They did it with gnashing of teeth. They did it with scorn and mockery. It was a homicide. They killed the Son of God with murderous intent.

This was carried out and driven by the majority of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish leadership. And they did not repent up this. Many of the people of Israel participated in the spirit of it when they were calling for His crucifixion. They called for Barabbas, rather than Christ to be released.

They continued in this hatred for Christ and the church of Christ into the days of the early church when they persecuted and killed Christians. So there was all this ongoing hatred toward the Christ and the bride of Christ, and as is depicted in this teaching, the hand of God's judgment fell upon Israel for that sin.

It says early in the parable that the owner himself planted the vineyard. Then it says that the owner himself came and destroyed the tenants. It was by the owners hand that they were planted. It was by the owners hand that they came under judgment.

So we would understand that a little bit later in AD 70, a man named General Titus came to be emperor of Rome and he totally decimated Jerusalem. The hand of God was at work in judgment, in measured and righteous indignation against the atrocities that took place. So at one level there was the human culpability in the death of the Christ, and judgment fell because of it.

But there is another astonishing and glorious and amazing level at which the Scripture speaks of the same events. At the same time, while these actions of human responsibility were taking place, there was something marvelous. For in His perfect knowledge of all things, when God formed His plan of salvation, He incorporated their own free murderous intent.

What they meant for evil, God used for good. So that, from the most atrocious event in human history, God created the most glorious moment in human history. So that, in the murder of the Son of God, God accomplished the atoning sacrifice of the Son of God. So that, in the death of the Messiah at human hands, we can share in the life and in the reign of the Messiah, who rose on the third day from death.

The wonder of all wonders is that even those who carried out the murder of the Son of God could benefit from the sacrifice of the Son of God, if their hearts would repent. Even as they crucified him, Jesus said, *Father forgive them, for they know not what they do*—those Romans that were being driven by those Jewish people that did know exactly what they did.

Even many of those Jews who knew what they were doing, if there was repentance in their hearts produced by the Holy Spirit that they would not stiffen their necks against, they would be washed clean. They would be forgiven. They would be made new. They would be born again. So that in the death of Christ, you have the saving power of Christ at work at the same time. It is a glorious and amazing work of the Lord our God.

I pray that our hearts will tremble before Him and that we would go before the Lord, saying, I am a sinner. *I am one who is deserving of death because of my resistance against Your truth all throughout my life. But, Lord, I come before You, humbling myself. Will You forgive me, Lord. Will You cleanse me. Will you make me new, and will You cause me to stand upon the Rock that so many have rejected? Will you make Him the foundation of my life? Will you help me to be firmly established on King Jesus, the king of Kings?*

We all need to come to the Lord by the work of the Spirit upon us and within us with humble and repentant hearts telling God that we need His saving grace. If you are here this morning and you would like to talk more about what it is to be a Christian, I would love to encourage in these things, that you might come to a living faith in the Rock of ages. Turn to Him. Trust in Him. Believe in Him. Be born again through faith by the grace of God.

If you are here and you are a Christian, you look at your Messiah by the work of the Spirit, yielding to that, saying, *Lord, bear fruit in my life. Help me to be a fruitful vineyard. Help me to abide in Him, that my life might be prolific with His character and with His grace.*

This morning we had a great series of songs talking about Christ our foundation, Christ the Rock on which we stand. I loved that wonderful choir number called *He is the Rock*. I pray that the melody of that song resonates in your heart and soul as you go through the week ahead of you. He is the Rock!

Next week we are coming back to a very, very important Psalm that Jesus quoted here in Verse 17:

**The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone?**

This is such an important verse quoted through the pages of Scripture. As I was studying for this sermon, I found myself preparing an entire second sermon just on that verse.

Many blessings to you, Bethel Grace. Jesus is the King. So many have and continue to treat Him with scorn, and I pray that we will treat with Him with love and worship and praise because He is so deserving. He is our Lord. He is full of love for us. Because He first loved us, let us love Him.

Let's close in a word of prayer.