

You're Going to Kill Me!

Luke 20:9-19



Jesus told the people this parable:

"A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so 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 that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out. Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.' But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So 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 kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!" Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: " 'The stone the builders rejected has become the Capstone^[or Cornerstone]? ^[Ps.118:22] Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."

The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

If you make a horrible mistake and know that you have to "fess up to it," a common way to soften the blow in admitting it is: "*You're going to kill me...but...*"

It's not likely that the other person would really kill you. But the reason you say that is because you sense the enormity & shame of your blunder, and you're admitting it could deserve a stiff reprimand or penalty. You'd never admit being "worthy" of being killed if you were *innocent* of any mistakes or wrongdoing!

But Jesus did, didn't He?! He hadn't done a thing to deserve death, yet He knew the underhanded scheming of His enemies. In one of the last parables that He told, He bluntly implied, right to their faces, what we'll use as our theme, today:

You're Going to Kill Me

Our text takes place on Tuesday of Holy Week. Some dramatic events have occurred the past 2 days that fueled the anger of the Jewish leaders, who were Jesus' vehement opponents.

First of all, two days earlier, on what we now call "Palm Sunday", Jesus rode into Jerusalem with great acclaim from cheering crowds. The Jewish leaders fumed with jealousy & hatred. For 3 years Jesus had been a thorn in their flesh because He had drawn people away from *their* authority. How? Because Jesus' message of "*repentance & forgiveness through God's mercy*"— not by work-righteousness in keeping all sorts of man-made ceremonial laws like these religious leaders — gave people's troubled consciences and guilty souls peace & encouragement. Moreover, Jesus' miracles backed up His divine message while they infuriated the Jewish leaders, who couldn't do such things. So—hotly jealous of the attention that Jesus got on Palm Sunday, a contingent of Jewish leaders confronted Jesus and told Him to rebuke the noisy crowd. Not intimidated, Jesus refused to obey their selfish request.

The next day, Monday of Holy Week, Jesus went to the Temple. With righteous anger over the profiteering business which the foreign currency exchange & the sale of sacrificial animals had turned into —much less the boisterous noise it all made in distracting nearby worshippers— Jesus over-turned money tables and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the Temple courts.^{Mk.11:15f} This enraged the Jewish leaders because Passover time was their big money-making time of the year as Jerusalem swelled with 10's of thousands of pilgrims from around the Empire who needed to exchange their foreign currency to pay their annual Temple tax and to purchase their sacrificial animals. By moving this whole market atmosphere into the spacious Gentile court of the Temple & charging higher prices for the convenience of these services, it was an outstanding way to boost their treasury. Consequently, they were incensed over Jesus' actions and were determined to *kill* Him!

As true God, Jesus knew what their minds were thinking. He also knew that the time for His crucifixion was at hand later that week. So during Holy Week, Jesus used the Temple court areas to do some of His final preaching before Good Friday & Easter. Our text was clearly intended to predict His death at the hands of the Jewish leaders. The *common folk* may not have understood Jesus' implications, but these *Jewish leaders* understood *exactly* what Jesus was inferring.

Jesus began the parable by describing a sharecropping situation. A landowner made an agreement with some local farmers over a vineyard he had recently planted. To pay his taxes on the property and on the harvest, plus to make some sort of increase on his investment, the landowner struck up an agreement: *the sharecroppers (tenants) would pledge to pay rent for the land and provide the owner with a percentage of the harvest.* It was a fair & honest deal to both sides.

Trusting that the sharecroppers would work hard to make their own investment pay off, the owner left and went abroad. He allowed their *free will* & their *sense of accountability* to him (by virtue of their side of the bargain) to be their guide & motivation in their work.

After several months, harvest time came. Expecting the sharecroppers to honor their covenant, the landowner sent a servant to collect his portion of the harvest. But instead of getting that percentage, he got a *beating* and was sent back to his master empty-handed! (The Greek word for “beating,” δειράντες, implies severe cuts & gashes.) That would have been enough for the master to come with a contingent of law enforcers, have them arrested, & charge them with brutality and reckless conduct. But the owner was a remarkable man of tremendous patience. He sent another servant, only to see him return likewise bruised, cut, & aching from a beating.

In an absolutely amazing response of patience, the owner sent *another* servant, who may have gone with a bit of trepidation, yet was loyal to, and obeyed, his master! Each of these servants was a reminder to the sharecroppers that they were violating their covenant promise. But their self-serving consciences were callous. They treated this 3rd servant even more viciously, deeply wounding him—perhaps with knives. The Greek word used for “wounded” is a word we’ve absorbed into our English language: *traumatized!*

The conduct of these sharecroppers was abominable, and the patience of the owner was above normal human standards! Giving these farming thugs one last chance to honor their contract, the owner sent his son. Certainly his son would be understood as directly representing the owner! And since these sharecroppers knew how deeply the owner loved his son, any treating of him with violence would be the same as treating the owner with violence.

So what happens when the showdown occurs? **When the tenants saw him [son], they talked the matter over. ‘This is the heir,’ they said. ‘Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours!’ So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.** Are they crazy? How could they possibly have such a warped brain to think that the owner would give them the vineyard as an inheritance if his son were dead?? That ludicrous delusion came to a screeching halt when the owner finally dealt with these thugs in righteous justice. After having them justly executed, He made sure that the inheritance went to people who worked together honestly & humbly with the owner.

After Jesus had finished the parable, the people’s response was one of revulsion: **“May this never be!”** they gasped. We’d say it something like this: “I sure hope something like that *never* happens around here!” But after the people had responded with such alarm, **Jesus looked directly at them and asked, “Then what is the meaning of that which is written: “ ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the Capstone’? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.”**

Jesus had quoted to them a verse from the famous Hallel Psalm—Ps. 118—which was a highly used psalm lauding God’s merciful ways. The Jews knew Psalm 118 as well as you know hymns like “A Mighty Fort-ress,” “Beautiful Savior,” “Joy To The World,” or “Amazing Grace.” It was chanted in many situations, including in every Jewish Passover Seder meal. Ironically, it is from this very psalm that people had chanted a verse 2 days earlier, on Palm Sunday: **Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.**^{v.26} Now, however, Jesus quoted this verse: **The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.**^{v.22} In doing so, Jesus was now bringing a spiritual meaning to His parable.

The VINEYARD was intended to represent *God’s people* – those blessed to be under His covenant. The SHARECROPPERS represent all the *false spiritual leaders* that Israel has had in their past and into Jesus’ day. The SERVANTS who were sent to the sharecroppers, honoring their master’s will even at peril to their own lives, represent the *prophets* whom God had sent to His people to remind them of the covenant with Him which they were ignoring & violating. And the beloved SON of the owner, of course, represents *Jesus Christ*.

Throughout the OT times, God had provided special prophets to call His spiritually & morally wandering people back to Him. They weren't producing "fruits of faith." In fact, they were rotting in their selfishness & worldly pursuits. But many of God's great prophet-servants who were sent to them—like Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.—met with stiff opposition, ridicule, & persecution, especially from those who knew better and didn't want to hear God's truth. God's word didn't suit them & what they selfishly wanted for themselves. In the book of Hebrews, we read about the fate of many of God's prophets: [They] **were tortured...Some faced jeers & flogging, while still others were chained & put in prison. They were stoned. They were sawed in two. They were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins & goatskins, destitute, persecuted, & mistreated...They wandered in deserts & mountains and in caves & holes in the ground.** (Hebr. 11:33-38)

Like the thugs in the parable, many Jewish spiritual & political leaders—much less the people them-selves—had lost any sense of accountability & responsibility to God and to His blessed covenant with them. They had become such spiritual dunces—spiritually & morally illogical and self-serving—so that in wanting to do things their own way, they actually thought they could get away with it! In fact, they wanted the *inheritance* for themselves, which means that they wanted ALL the blessings of God—even heaven—without serving and obeying Him & His covenant with honor & gratitude.

For the spiritual leaders this included expecting God's people to follow their false theology and to obey *their* dictates of religion rather than God's. In fact, they had developed a nice, lucrative system for themselves that also provided them with prestige & power! Why give any credence to God's prophets?? Why talk about repentance & spiritual redemption through the Messiah? By making the people feel dependent on *their system*, not on Christ, they could control them so much better. Even more, the great majority of the people went along with all this corruption. They, too, joined in resisting God's will, in failing to repent of their selfish ways, and in justifying their worldly way of doing things while still considering themselves "religious" & "decent."

Finally God sent His dearly loved eternal Son. Jesus did not come to this world only to redeem us, but to restate & reinforce the truth of God's Word & covenants. That means Jesus preached sin—sin as the 10 Commandments define sin, not as public opinion or false teachers did. Jesus preached repentance – the activity that involves admitting our sin against almighty God and coming to Him for strength to change selfish & worldly ways of thinking, speaking, & living. Jesus preached grace – the unearnable love of God by which He richly & freely forgives us, since Jesus paid the penalty of all our sins. Jesus preached sanctification – living the life of thanks to God in weekly worship & daily devotions, in practicing stewardship of our time/talents/ money to God, and in responding to the Great Commission not to hoard the Gospel but to get its message out to our fellowman, here & around the world.

What Jesus came to preach, though, was not what the Jewish spiritual & political leaders wanted to hear. In fact, many of the people turned away from Jesus' teaching, too. Even more, the same thing is happening in our day! Fraudulent religious leaders thrive with messages & religious systems that oppose the true Gospel of Jesus' full redeeming work for us. They appeal to our sinful vanity & worldly-thinking and, in various ways, preach a message that tells people they can get God's inheritance by just being decent people, living good lives, according to what *they* call "decent." They preach no 10 Commandments, or they alter them to fit public opinion. They preach no genuine repentance and the need to rely solely on the blood of Jesus Christ. They question the authority of the Scriptures & its verbal inspiration so that they can eliminate those portions that don't suit them. (Do you realize that, in our day, there are Lutheran pastors/churches who don't even teach Luther's Catechism any longer for presenting fundamental biblical doctrines to prepare people for receiving Holy Communion?!)

And you know what? Many people are buying into the spiritual & moral rebellion of our day in opposition to God's truth! Many parents take little or no responsibility to actively & daily teach their children truths of God's Word & of Jesus; they don't want that God-given responsibility. Even more, many people want the inheritance of God with no accountability to Him in their daily living! It's "déjà vu" all over again! *The corruption of the sharecroppers is still alive & in opposition to Christ.*

Because of such antagonistic ill will, Jesus predicted that the Jewish spiritual leaders would be killing Him—which is precisely what happened 3 days later. And while the people who listened

to the parable were aghast over the barbarity of the sharecroppers—exclaiming **May this never happen!**—the selfish barbarism that the Jewish leaders & their followers carried out on Jesus 3 days later was far more despicable! Even more, the common folk joined in on calling for His crucifixion! In the same way, today, people oppose the Je-sus of Scripture & want Him out of their way. Or they want to reshape Him according to their desires. And when they are forced to confront Him for what He truly represents, they get furious—including saying nasty things at the messengers of Christ.

When the thugs of the parable killed the son of the owner in cold blood, they were, appropriately, executed. Jesus declared a disastrous fate would come on those who had rejected & would kill Him: **“The Stone the builders rejected has become the capstone. Everyone who falls on that Stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom It falls will be crushed!”** The 2 Greek words translated as “capstone” are more literally translated “*head of the corner*,” which is why this can also be translated “Cornerstone.” This stone was the first stone laid in construction. It set up the proper lines for all the other walls. If you laid the corner-stone crooked or slightly tilted, you would have a crooked building or a construction nightmare. As our Cornerstone, Jesus draws the lines in which we are to build our lives. He guides us in the right & proper ways--the ways of repentance, forgiveness, salvation, & new life in Him. He guides us in aligning the building of our hearts & lives with God according to both Law & Gospel.

For those not wanting to follow Jesus as their Cornerstone for their life, He compares them to some-thing like pottery coming into contact with a large, hard stone: **SMASH**—whether the pottery falls on the stone or the stone on the pottery. That pottery, first of all, represents the unbelieving Jewish leaders, but, more broadly, anyone who doesn’t trust in Jesus as their only Savior and live in His ways. Come Judgment Day, if not before, that Cornerstone (Jesus) will smash all the arrogance, self-righteousness, selfish priorities, impenitence, & unbelief of those who would not truly make Him the Cornerstone of their faith and earthly life. He will crush them in hell forever, and He may already bring down heavy judgment on them in this life. For example, 40 years after Jesus died and rose, the great pride & joy of the Jewish leaders—the magnificent Temple of Jerusalem—was toppled & burned by the Roman army. For 19½ centuries, now, the Jews have had no Temple. Their whole system of work-righteous sacrificing & money-making schemes, in which they had twisted God’s Word and dominated the souls of the people, was ripped from them.

We don’t know whether all the *people* listening to Jesus understood what He was saying. But we *are* told that the *spiritual leaders* knew! And, instead of admitting their jealous antagonism—confessing their sin of unbelief and need to change—they only got more furious in their determination to eliminate Jesus. Think how God used their arrogant anger to accomplish the world’s salvation!

While this parable seems to focus heavily on obstinate rebellion against God & His divine judgment, it does show the Gospel/Good News of our saving God. **(1)** We see it in the patience of God towards hard-heart-ed indifference, depicted by the owner of the vineyard repeatedly sending representatives to the rebels. Don’t abuse God’s patience! Repent & prepare your hearts daily to receive Him! **(2)** We see it in the love of God depicted by the owner sending his own dear son to appeal to those belligerent rebels. This all pictures the amazing & earnest love of God that is beyond human understanding. Treasure it! Hold on to it in thanks & praise! **(3)** Even more, the Gospel is very clear when the son, depicted as the true heir of the vineyard, was thrown out of the vineyard and killed. How Jesus prophesies that He, Himself, would be taken outside of His own Temple & the city of Jerusalem to be spitefully crucified on Calvary.

Yet that would not terminate Jesus; it would be the means by which He would win the victory and, in turn, crush the opposition. Using their very killing of Him would help Him accomplish paying for the sins of the world & suffering our rightful death & curse of hell. And when He would rise from the grave, He would make sure to establish and prosper the building of His New Testament Church as its Cornerstone! On Judgment Day, then, He will rid His faithful believers of having to deal with the spiritual apathy & antagonism of those who oppose what Christ asks them to believe & do. They will be sent to hell forever.

This parable was one of the last times that Jesus prophesied His upcoming death, and He did it *to the face of those who’d be doing it!* It assures you & me that Jesus was in charge of His destiny, He knew His fate, He understood His mission to save us, and He was following His Father’s

plans to the “T.” We have a Savior who willingly came to die for us...He was *not* taken captive and killed against His will. He was not taken by surprise. And when He bluntly told His fiercest enemies, “*You’re going to kill Me,*” it *would* happen—for our eternal Salvation!



Dear Lord Jesus,

In obeying Your Father’s will and plan of salvation, You went forward into Your ministry on this earth. You taught while also performing miracles to demonstrate Your divinity amidst your humanity. That reassures us that Your words and teachings were straight from heaven—fully representing the Father, even as many a prophet represented Him in Old Testament times. You taught Your Father’s will and His new covenant for the world that provides forgiveness and salvation through Your blood, even as it must expect contrition and repentance of sin. When You came to this world, You wound up suffering and dying horribly at the hands of wicked men who despised You and what You stood for. You knew this would happen, but You also knew that, in doing so, You would be able to redeem us back to You with Your precious life.

For Your unselfish sacrifice and desire to take us to be with You, help us daily lay our sins before You and seek the Holy Spirit to change us from within in our attitudes, thoughts, words, and behaviors, reflecting a genuine thankful love for You. As we walk through this short life, keep us from becoming entangled by sin and transgression against Your good and holy commands. Align our lives with Your saving will as a solid Cornerstone to our faith and conduct. Help us run with perseverance the race that You have marked out for us. Hold before us the example of those who have gone before us bearing the cross for You. As You led them, so lead us.

Help us come humbly before Your presence in taking Your holy, covenantal Supper – contrite of our sinful life and seeking Your forgiving words and encouraging promises in living for You. May we not take it with an impenitent, reckless, or thankless attitude but for the renewing of our faith.

Be with our shut-ins and those suffering from various ailments. Help us all use these last 2 weeks of Lent to seriously prepare our hearts for the sacred somberness of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, but also for the exuberant joy of Easter Sunday. We pray in Your name, Lord Jesus, as You also taught us....

LORD’S PRAYER