

April 6, 2025

Luke 20:9-19

This week we are in a similar situation as last week. Jesus is addressing the religious leadership of Israel in Jerusalem, except this is the same week that he would be crucified. Right before this parable, they had asked Jesus, “what authority do you have to teach these people?” And Jesus asks them, “John the Baptist, did he have authority from God, or was he just a regular teacher?” John the Baptist, some of you know, was the prophet, preacher that had been put to death, but also rejected by the religious leaders. That puts the religious leaders in a bit of a pickle, because if they say, “He was just a regular person, no divine authority,” they would lose the respect of all the people because they thought John was a prophet, because he was. But if they say, “he had divine authority,” Jesus would then ask, “why didn’t you listen to him?” It shows the hypocrisy and spiritual cowardice of the religious leaders of that time. They didn’t want to actually be challenged and humbled by the preachers of God’s Word, but they also didn’t want people to stop listening to them. So Jesus tells them this parable that shows how fallen and corrupt they’ve become. But as you read this parable, you see that it doesn’t just apply to a few religious leaders, but also to us. Jesus has a sobering message to us as well where he, in short, shows us what is wrong with us, and it’s this: **We are all Tenants Pretending to be Owners.** And he highlights three specific relationships that prove how broken we all are: **1. The Tenants and the Owner, 2. The Tenants and the Servants, 3. The Tenants and the Son.**

1. The Tenants and the Owner. Jesus tells this parable about a vineyard, and immediately his listeners, both the regular people in the crowds and the religious experts would have known exactly what he was doing. In the Old Testament, like we saw in the Isaiah reading, God often compares his people Israel to a vineyard that he planted, took care of, and when he goes and sees if there’s any fruit, there is none. The idea is that Israel, as a people, God created, God saved from slavery, God guided into the promised land, God defeated her enemies, God gave his Law and guided them in his ways, and they rebelled against him constantly! Now, Jesus is putting a bit of a twist on this picture by saying that the vineyard, God’s people, has tenants. Workers. At this time in history, it wouldn’t be uncommon for a person with a vineyard to hire it out to workers, especially if he lived in a different place. The workers would get paid, but they would owe a certain percentage of their earnings to the owner, and that makes sense because if the crop fails, the owner is the one who takes the hit. The religious leaders, the chief priests who were in charge of spiritually leading the people were acting like a bunch of tenants that thought they were the owners of the vineyard. The religious leaders looked at the people God called them to serve and said, “I’m going to teach what I want to teach. I’m going to take the money that I want to take. I’m going to condemn who I want to condemn. I’m going to have the biggest houses, the most money, the most honor, and I’ll use God as a way to get there.” And Jesus is saying to them, “you’re wrong. You are not the owner of these people, and you must rule the way God tells you to.”

Yet, this isn't just a Jewish religious problem, it's a human problem. We are all tenants that want to be owners. Most of you know my daughter by now. You may even find her entertaining or adorable. Do not be fooled. She's beginning to build a vocabulary- would you like to guess what words she uses the most? "No," and "Mine." We tell her it's time for a bath, time to eat, time to sleep, time to stop playing with the oven or stop drawing on herself with markers and she always says, "NO!" And whenever she takes something that she thinks belongs to her, a pen, my phone, even as I look she yells, "mine!" Who else does that? Probably every single child that has ever existed. And the difference between us and children is just how the words develop. "No" turns into "God can't tell me what to do! I can't worship a God who says this, or doesn't allow this. If God were really loving, he would allow me to have this. If God doesn't allow me to do and think what I want, then he can't really exist." "Mine" develops into "What I do with my money is my business," "What I believe is my business," "When and how I worship God is my business." "What goes on in my bedroom is my business." According to Jesus, that's not true. Your intellect, your time, your job, your money, your body, your relationships are all gifts from God. You don't own them. God owns them and he has given them to you, and you are accountable to him on how you use them. Be honest. Do you like that idea? Probably not- and that's the point. All of us are by nature hostile to God. We don't like him, even if we don't realize it. Paul says in Romans the sinful mind is "hostile, enmity" toward God. That's how we are. And if you're looking for proof of this, don't simply look at how we react toward him, but toward his servants.

2. Tenants and Servants. Jesus continues the parable and says the owner sent tenants to receive the share of the crop. And the problem wasn't that there wasn't any crop, but that the tenants hated the idea that they would have to give anyone any share of the crops of their vineyard, so they beat up, whipped, and ridiculed the servants the owner sent. In love, he kept sending servants to remind them about the truth: "You are the tenants, the owner deserves his share of the crops," and the tenants kept ignoring, beating, and kicking them out empty handed. That, in a way, sums up Israel's history. When you look at the Old Testament, you'll find a common theme that Jesus is pointing out here- the prophets sent by God to tell them his will were almost unanimously ignored, and often hated, persecuted, and sometimes killed. Moses, the great prophet that led Israel out of Egypt- the people seriously considered stoning him multiple times. The Prophet Samuel's advice was constantly ignored. The prophet Elijah had a death sentence from the King and Queen of Israel at the time. Same with Elisha. Isaiah, the one who wrote the vineyard parable, tradition tells us that he was sawn in two. Jeremiah was kicked out of the country. All the prophets were at the very least ignored, normally hated.

How do you respond when you hear something in a sermon that you don't like? How do you respond when Pastor says something needs to change in your life, or that you might be wrong about something? Do you get mad and defensive? Do you say things like, "Pastor, you're here to serve us, you don't get to tell me what to do?" Do you ignore it and think, "Well, he's just young and ambitious, I don't have to take him seriously." Please understand, I'm not infallible, I'm not God, but if I point something out to you in his Word, and you reject it, you are not rejecting me.

You're scoffing at the creator of the universe. And if there's something you don't like about what I say, you should compare it to the Word of God! Don't ignore it! And if I may, be honest. If you don't like something you hear from me or the Scriptures, ask yourself- "Why don't I like that?" Why does that offend me? Be honest. This problem you have with God, or the Bible, or with the church, or with that teaching, is it because it's not biblical, not sensible, not rational? Or is it because it's telling you that you're wrong? Aldous Huxley was a philosopher in the 20th century, famously critical of Christianity, and he was honest and admitted why he didn't believe in the God of the Bible: *"I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning; and consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics. He is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do. For myself, as no doubt for most of my friends, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom. The supporters of this system claimed that it embodied the meaning - the Christian meaning, they insisted - of the world. There was one admirably simple method of confuting these people and justifying ourselves in our erotic revolt: we would deny that the world had any meaning whatever."*

The point is this: God is going to send you prophets, either a pastor or an experience that tells you that you're wrong about things. Each of us is probably wrestling with something. There's a person that we need to forgive. There's a sin we need to repent for. There's an addiction that needs to be confessed and addressed. There's a person you're doing things with that you shouldn't be. There's a bitterness you're holding onto. There's something that probably needs to change, and you know it. And what humans tend to do is find reasons to ignore because they don't want it to be true. And if you really don't want it to be true, you won't believe it. You'll reject God's servants, and eventually his own Son.

3. The Tenants and the Son. Jesus then adds another twist to the parable. The owner wants to have a relationship with these tenants, so he sends his own son figuring that they'll certainly respect him. But the tenants are so bent on being the owners of the vineyard, they think if they kill the son, they can once and for all be the owners. So that's what they do. Sometimes, I hear people say, "Why doesn't God just come down and explain everything to us? I won't listen to this book, but I'll listen to God if he comes down and talks to me!" No you wouldn't. He did come. And we killed him. Please understand: the people that mercilessly demanded Jesus' death and laughed at him while he slowly bled out were people that read their bibles much more than us, prayed more than us, gave more to charity than us, and spent a lot more time in church than most of us. If they are capable of something so heinous as murdering the God they claim to worship, what are we capable of? When we are confronted with a God who disagrees with our culture, with what we believe, with what we think we have the right to do, there is a choice to be made. You will either reject him, or you will find in him your everything and foundation of your entire life. The question is this: "Is it worth it? Is Jesus worth following? Is Jesus worth my faith,

my trust, and therefore full surrender of everything I have?" My friends, he's absolutely worth following. Because no other god would dare love you like this. No other god would dare come to his people and let them slaughter him, and pray for them as they do it, all so sinners who hate him can be saved. No other god would dare let himself look like a fool so that fools can be embraced as children of God. No other would dare let himself suffer so that those who deserve to suffer can enjoy the pleasure of eternal life. No other god would dare allow himself to be captive and punished for all sin so that sinners can be set free. No other God would dare love you that much.

I won't lie to you. If you follow him, he may ask you to change your mind on some things. He will ask you to not live together before you are married. He will ask you to give up the dream of keeping up with the Joneses, sacrifice comforts, treasure, and time for the sake of his Kingdom. He will ask that you disagree with your culture on some pretty major things, and you may be ridiculed. So was he. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone- the stone that people have rejected, Jesus, is the foundation of the entire universe, he was rejected by his own people, and yet he is the God of all creation who was crushed for you. Therefore, all who reject him will be crushed, but those who trust in him will always find shelter, forgiveness, acceptance, joy, and life forever. He's worth it.

Here we have a firm foundation;

Here's the refuge of the lost:

Christ, the Rock of our salvation:

His the name of which we boast.

Lamb of God, for sinners wounded!

Sacrifice to cancel guilt!

None shall ever be confounded

Who on him their hope have built.