

Luke 20:9-19 The Parable/Tale of the Terrible Tenants

The Green Bay Packers had the 2nd overall pick in the 1989 NFL draft. The Packers could have chosen one of these future Hall of Famers: Barry Sanders, Derrick Thomas, Deion Sanders, or Troy Aikman. Instead, they choose Tony Mandarich. He played four seasons at GB, never lived up to expectations, and ended up being a dud. The Packers organization rejected four of the best players ever to play the game in favor of a washout.

Today we'll see how the nation of Israel mishandled a much more significant choice. When given the opportunity to recognize their Messiah, they chose to reject him. The results for Israel would be catastrophic.

Last week, we looked at the first part of this passage, where the Jewish religious leaders attempted to discredit Jesus by questioning his authority. In response to that exchange, Jesus tells this parable.

Jesus often used parables to teach truth. In this case, the parable reveals God's dissatisfaction with the Jews and his intent to punish them for their disobedience.

This parable also shows the fate of those who have had multiple opportunities to accept the truth but keep rejecting it. Many people hear the Gospel time after time and reject it each time. Eventually, their opportunities will run out, and they'll face severe judgment. God will hold them accountable for the fact that they knew the truth and rejected it time after time.

The main theme of the parable is that God is about to destroy the nation of Israel. They have officially rejected their Messiah, and God is about to officially reject them. Judgment is coming, and the only way to avoid it is to fall at the feet of Jesus.

Let's take a closer look the Parable of the Terrible Tenants.

- I. .9 A certain landowner developed a vineyard and leased it out to tenant farmers.
 - A. Vineyards were very common in the region, so the audience would have understood the details of the story. Every Jew would have understood the symbolism.
 - B. The vineyard was a common symbol for the nation of Israel (cf. Ps 80:8-16; Isa 5:1-7). Israel was God's vineyard. In particular, the vineyard here stands for the privileges and advantages the Jews enjoyed as God's chosen people.

- C. Further, it was common for landowners to hire others to care for their property. Landlords often lived elsewhere and entrusted the management of their farms to renters.
 - D. The landowner symbolizes God, and the workers symbolize the Jewish leaders, who were responsible to manage the nation. Remember that Jesus had just been talking to the religious leaders, so they are clearly the tenant farmers in this story.
 - E. The owner makes an arrangement with the tenants, who would pay him a certain percentage of the harvest as rent. God expected the Jewish leaders to make a positive contribution to his program. They were supposed to hold up their end of the bargain. The owner expected his property to be productive.
 - F. When harvest time arrived, the owner sent his servants to collect some of the proceeds from the vineyard, but the workers beat and abused them.
 - 1. The servants here represent the OT prophets whom God sent to exhort and warn the people.
 - 2. The abusive treatment experienced by the servants mirrors the kind of abuse and persecution many of the prophets received from the Jews. E.g., Jeremiah.
 - 3. The result was that the owner got nothing from his vineyard. What this points to is the fact that the Jewish religious leaders had failed in their most basic responsibilities—i.e., to obey God and to cooperate with his program.
- II. .13-15a The owner then decided to send his beloved son to the vineyard, thinking that the workers would respect him.
- A. The son would have the full authority of his father, the owner of the vineyard, and, as heir, would also represent the father's interests.¹ The tenants should have had the same respect for the son as what they had for his father, the owner of the vineyard.
 - B. But the workers decided to kill the son and seize the property for themselves.

¹ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 707.

- C. The son represents Jesus, the Son of God, whom the Jews shortly would torture and murder.
1. Notice that those sent previously were “servants” (vss. 10-11). The OT prophets were servants. But Jesus is described as “my beloved son” (vs. 13). Jesus is more than a servant; he is the Son. Jesus is a prophet, but he’s much more than a prophet.
 2. The tenants treated the servants shamefully—beating them and throwing them out. God had put up with the disobedient and idolatrous behavior from the Jews for 2000 years. But God is about to make a big change in his program.
 3. Gal 4:4 “When the fullness of time was come...” God sent his beloved son into the world.
- D. .13b The owner’s intent in sending his son was that the renters would “reverence him when they see him.” I.e., the correct response to the owner’s son was to show respect or regard for him. They should have respected the son like they respected the owner. They should have recognized his authority.
- John 5:23 all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.*
- App:** Many religions claim to honor the Father, but they refuse to honor the Son. But if you don’t honor the Son, then you have no access to the Father. John 14:6.
- E. .14 The workers’ plan to kill the son and seize the property for themselves **reflects** the Jewish leaders’ jealousy and hypocrisy. What was most important to them was retaining control over the vineyard and enriching themselves, and they were ready to murder anyone who threatened their position and power. That was certainly true of the Jewish religious leaders.
- F. .15a All of this means that Jesus knows what’s about to happen. The leaders of the Jews would murder Jesus. “They cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him.” Jesus was crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem.
- III. .15b-16 What would be the results of this? The owner would destroy those wicked workers and lease his property out to others.
- A. In other words, God would judge the Jewish religious rulers, remove them leadership, and replace them with others.

1. .16 “He shall come and destroy those husbandmen.” The Jews were guilty of mistreating the prophets and of killing the Messiah. God’s intent now was to destroy the nation. That happened in 70 AD.
 2. Notice that the vineyard itself is not destroyed, only the tenant farmers. God’s program would go on, but without the Jewish religious leaders in charge. God would accomplish his purposes in a different way than previously. God’s program would go on without the nation of Israel.
- B. .16b The owner would give the vineyard to “others.” The privileges the Jews had enjoyed would be taken away from Israel and given to those who will bring forth fruit.
1. This signals a major change in God’s dealings with man. The Jews and Israel would no longer be the center of God’s program for the world. God would set aside the Jewish system; he would turn his attention elsewhere.
 2. As a side note, we should recognize several times in history when God changed his dealings with man. As God reveals new information, man’s responsibilities change. This parable shows that God is about to do that again. A new dispensation is about to begin.
 3. Other workers would now be the center of God’s program. Who are these “others”? These are believers in Jesus—i.e., the church. Shortly before the destruction of Israel, the church was born (Acts 2).
 4. The book of Acts shows the transition in God’s program from the centrality of Israel to the centrality of the church. The Jews are no longer the center of God’s program for the world.
 5. The death and resurrection of Christ marked the beginning of the church age; God’s central program for the world is the church, not the nation of Israel.

Acts 13:46 Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you [Jews] first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.”

6. Although God has given the vineyard to others, the Bible assures us that God still has a plan for the nation of Israel. The church has *not* replaced Israel in God's prophetic plan. A future generation of Jews will accept Jesus as the Messiah, and God will fulfill all his promises to national Israel (cf. Ro 11:26-27).
7. It's an error to believe that the church fulfills *all* the promises God made to the nation of Israel in the OT. I believe those promises will be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom when Jesus returns. God still has a plan for Israel; but right now, the center of God's plan is the church.

App: That means that if you are a part of the church, you have a great responsibility to participate in God's program for the world. We are now responsible for the vineyard; we are the farmers. We dare not abuse our privileges. Instead, we must be doing the Lord's work. We should be seeking to bring forth fruit for the glory of God.

How are you contributing in the vineyard?

- IV. Jesus then quoted a passage from the Psalms, asserting that the stone which the builders rejected became the head corner stone.
 - A. This Messianic prophecy from Psalm 118:22-23 reveals that the Jews would reject their Messiah, but also that rejection would not prevent God's program from going forward.
 - B. The cornerstone of a building is the most important single part. That stone bears the weight and stress of the walls built on it. The stability and strength of a building depends on the corner stone.
 - C. Jesus is the center and support of God's continuing program in the world. He is the head of the church.
 - D. So the very one whom they rejected—Jesus—would ultimately be supreme. Jesus is the foundational element of God's new building—the church.
 - E. The Jewish religious leaders had asked about Jesus' authority, and here he's claiming ultimate, supreme authority—he is the cornerstone of God's entire program.
 - F. And Jesus is warning the people not to do what the Jewish leaders had done—i.e., reject the chief corner stone.
 - G. .17-18 Those who "fall" on the stone will be broken, but whomever the stone falls upon will be ground to powder.

1. Jesus, as chief corner stone, would be both the center of God's redemptive plan for the world as well as the focal point of judgment.
2. This is a quote from Isa 8:13-15, which is a prophecy regarding God's judgment of Israel.
3. To fall on the stone is to acknowledge Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Cf. Rom 10:9; Phil 2:10
4. To have the stone fall on you is to experience the judgment of God. To be "ground to powder" is to be destroyed. All who reject Jesus will suffer eternal loss.
Joh 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."
5. So the Jews rejected Jesus, but eventually, he will reject them.
6. And if you want to avoid judgment, you must recognize Jesus as the chief corner stone. Those who reject him will suffer severe judgment—they'll be ground to powder.

V. .19 The Jewish leaders rightly perceived that Jesus had spoken this parable against them.

- A. .19 Jesus told some very perplexing parables, but this was not one of them. The meaning of the parable was obvious, and the Jews didn't like what Jesus was saying about them.

God had put them in charge of his work, but they had ignored and mistreated the prophets and abused their privileges, generation after generation. The Jews had rejected God's final representative—God's own beloved Son. Now, God was about to reject the Jews, and they would experience severe judgment. The Jewish leaders understood this message and they didn't like it one bit.

It's interesting to note that the Jews didn't deny any of these allegations. They couldn't deny this because they knew it was true. All they could do was either admit the truth or try to destroy the one who told them the truth.

Usually in the Bible, when a prophet threatens destruction, the way to avoid that result is to repent. If the people will admit their sins and repent, God will relent; he will not fulfill the judgment that he threatens. E.g., Nineveh—"Yet 40 days..."

We know that the Jews would not repent. Remember that Jesus wept over the city when he entered it just a few days before this. Jesus knew what was about to happen. The Jewish leaders had already made up their minds about Jesus. There was no sign of repentance, so there was no way to avoid the coming judgment.

App: Whenever we hear the truth, we have to decide what we'll do with it. Will we accept it even if the truth hurts, even if we have to repent? Or will we deny the truth and get angry that someone pointed it out to us? The correct response whenever we are threatened with judgment is to repent of our sins.

- B. We see two responses to all of this.
1. .16 Some of the people said "God forbid." Literally, "may it never be."
 - a) For about 2000 years, ever since the time of Abraham, the Jews had been at the center of God's program; they were God's chosen people. The idea that God would end this favored status for the Jews is almost unthinkable.
 - b) It seems that some of the people are concerned about this and hope that it would never come to pass. They were sensitive to this message; they take it seriously.
 2. .19 The Jewish leaders, on the other hand, respond to this threat with increased hostility. They wanted to arrest Jesus, but they had to wait for an opportunity when the crowds would not get in their way. This was Tuesday, and that opportunity would come on Friday.

This parable is an illustration of John 1:11 *He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.*

The Jews rejected their Messiah, and God transferred his interest from the nation of Israel to the church. God has taken away the privileged position of the Jews and given it to "others." We are now living in the church age. We are now the tenant farmers serving in God's vineyard. He's given the vineyard to us. It's now our responsibility to be fruitful and have something to show for our labor. God wants us to be productive and bear fruit. Are we producing anything? Are we being fruitful? I hope/trust that God will not say of us what he said to the Jews.

Another lesson here is that the right response to truth is that we affirm it and apply it to ourselves. If someone rebukes you, and if the criticism is true, then the thing to do is admit your error and repent. Unfortunately, when confronted by the truth, we often respond with anger and hostility. Let's make sure we don't do that.

Perhaps you are *not* a servant in the Lord's vineyard. You are not a part of the church because you've never put your faith in Jesus to save you from your sins. If that's the case, don't be like the tenant farmers in the parable. Don't reject the son of the vineyard owner. Make use of the opportunity you have. Fall on the chief corner stone lest the corner stone fall on you.

It's interesting to consider what would have happened had the Packers chosen Barry Sanders or Deion Sanders instead of Tony Mandarich. The Packers might have won a few more games, but that's about it. The implications of that choice were fairly small. The implications of failing to choose Jesus are far greater. Israel rejected Jesus, and God severely judged the nation as a result. We all have a very important choice to make: either we fall before the chief corner stone in reverence and worship, or it falls on us in judgment. I hope you'll make the right choice.