

ST. ANDREW'S, BLACKROCK & BRAY - 21ST MARCH 2021

THE PARABLES OF JESUS; THE TENANTS (LUKE 20:9-19)

Welcome

Welcome to our 'Church at Home' service transcript for Sunday 21st March 2021. Today we come to the end of our series on the parables of Jesus, with the Wicked Tenants from Luke 20:9-19. I hope that this transcript will be an encouragement to you today." - Rev. Andrew Gill

Call to Worship – Psalm 119:10-16

*With my whole heart I seek you;
do not let me stray from your commandments.
I treasure your word in my heart,
so that I may not sin against you.
Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes.
With my lips I declare
all the ordinances of your mouth.
I delight in the way of your decrees
as much as in all riches.
I will meditate on your precepts,
and fix my eyes on your ways.
I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.*

Opening Prayer

Father God,

We praise your name for the beauty of spring, the glory of the sky by day and by night, the healthy wind and refreshing rain. We thank you for the bloom and fragrance of the flowers, the songs of the birds, and the joy of every living thing. In all that you have made we see the wonder of your wisdom and care. You clothe the grass of the field and take thought for the sparrows. Help us to trust in your never-

failing goodness, the love which is beyond our understanding, and surrounds our lives with blessings; for your Name's sake.

Most Merciful God,
by the death and resurrection
of your Son Jesus Christ,
you created humanity anew.
Grant that by faith in him
who suffered on the cross,
we may triumph in the power of his victory;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Reading Luke 20:9-19

And 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. 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. Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? 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." 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."

The 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.

Sermon - 'Parables of Jesus; the Tenants'

Over the last few weeks we have been looking at the parables of Jesus. These stories paint a picture of what the kingdom of God is like. Today we have come to the final parable that Jesus told, and it is decision time. We must provide an answer to those essential questions of 'who is Jesus?' and 'how will I respond to him?'

In many ways this parable is aimed at those religious leaders that were opposing Jesus and his ministry. In his final few days, Jesus is once more pleading with them not to reject him. The end of chapter 19 and the beginning of chapter 20 set the scene for this parable, it is the Tuesday of what we call 'holy week' and Jesus is just 72 hours away from the cross. He is in the temple preaching the gospel to the crowds that have assembled for the passover, but the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and other religious and community leaders are plotting to kill him. After being questioned about this authority, Jesus tells the people this parable, *"A man planted a vineyard, rented it out to some farmers and went away for a long time."* (v.9)

This would have been a familiar practice; a landowner plants a vineyard, goes away, and hires others to look after it. They live on the land, work it, and they give to the owner part of the harvest that is owed to him. But of course, as with all these parables, this has a deeper meaning. Throughout the Old Testament the imagery of a vineyard is used to describe Israel, and it is the same here. The man represents God, and the tenants are the religious leaders. This story of the Bible; God is the creator who redeemed Israel out of slavery in Egypt, choosing them to be his special people, and gave them the land of Israel. He called them to produce the fruit of blessings for the world, but in the history of Israel we see that the leaders failed constantly to give to God what he deserved. It is the same in this story too, let us look at verse 10, *"At harvest time 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.”

The tenants refused to give the owner the fruit and they reject the servant, which is a picture of sin. Sin is when we refuse to give God what he deserves and reject his authority. Israel had failed to produce a harvest of prayer, worship, justice, and faithfulness. God in his mercy sends his prophets to call Israel to repentance, but they continually reject God's word. *“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.”* (vv.11-12) These verses illustrate the patience of God and the persistence of sin. For hundreds of years God sent his prophets to Israel, but the leaders stubbornly refused to listen. And that is the natural condition of every human heart. We were created to give glory to God, but we reject him. And the longer that we go on ignoring his word, the harder our heart becomes. Sin tightens its grip on us, and our rejection of God becomes even more hostile. But God's love still continues, and his patience endures, and he has a plan for salvation.

“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.” (vv.13-15a) The owner sending his son into the vineyard is to be understood as God sending Jesus. He is not just another prophet, but God's beloved son. In these verses he predicts how the leaders will conspire to kill him. Soon their rejection of God will be complete; with sinful actions they will reject God's rule, with stubborn hearts they will refuse God's word, and with selfish pride they will murder God's son.

What will God do next? Jesus continues his parable, “What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” (v.15b-16a) There are repercussions to rejection. In this parable the wicked tenants are killed, and the vineyard is given to new tenants. This represents how the leadership of God's people was taken away from the Jewish leaders and given to Jesus and his disciples. The plans and the promises of God are

permanent, but the systems, institutions, the authorities, and even the churches that they come through are all removable. When the original audience heard this in verse 16 they gasped with shock, *"When the people heard this they said, 'God forbid!' 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 cornerstone.'"*

Jesus quotes from Psalm 118 which is a messianic psalm about how God's chosen king will always triumph over his enemies. The imagery switches from agriculture to construction, and the leaders are now compared to builders mistaking something valuable as worthless and throwing it away in the skip. The cornerstone was the most important part of a building and Jesus is pointing to his resurrection. By his resurrection Christ will become the foundation of his church, and prove that he is more than just an amazing storyteller, he is the son of God.

Jesus ends this parable with a severe warning of the judgment that is coming to those who continually reject him, and refuse to accept him as the messiah. Verse 18, *"Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom with falls will be crushed."* It does not matter if you drop a glass on a rock or drop a rock on a glass, the result for the glass is the same either way. There are many ways to reject Jesus and his teaching but the result is always the same. But maybe you ask, 'What about love? What about forgiveness?' But remember, it was precisely because of Christ's message of love, that the religious leaders wanted to kill him. They wanted law, not grace, they wanted to feel superior to other people, and they wanted to know that they were in and that others were out because of how they lived. They constantly rejected Christ's message and offer of grace, again, and again, so they will receive his judgment. Listen to how they respond to hearing this parable in verse 19, *"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."*

They heard this parable and they knew that it was directed at them, yet they chose to reject it, and refused to listen. So what about us? Are we going to accept Jesus or reject him? Will Jesus be your foundation stone of life, or will he be a falling stone of destruction?

For the second year in a row it is looking like we will be unable to gather together for an in-person Easter celebration, and to some it might look like Easter is non-essential. But there is nothing more essential to life than the events of Easter! Just three days after Jesus told this parable, he was murdered by the people who heard it. But then three days after that he rose victorious from the grave! The stone the builders rejected, has indeed become the cornerstone.

Imagine for a moment that your heart is like the vineyard. Are you going to be like the wicked talents who reject God and refuse to listen to his word? Or will you invite Jesus in, accept his love and grace, listen to his word, and by his help produce a fruit of worship, prayer, and obedience?

Prayer

*Lord Jesus,
you are the stone the builders rejected
which has become the cornerstone.*

*I confess to you my sinful actions,
the stubborn inclination of my heart,
and all my selfish pride.*

Please forgive me.

*Today I accept you as my God,
and invite you into my life.*

*Holy Spirit, help me to listen,
and produce within me
the fruit of worship and love.*

Amen.