

The title of this morning's sermon is "*The Parable of the Vineyard Owner.*"

We are working our way verse-by-verse through Luke's Gospel and find ourselves at **Luke 20:11**.

Jim Elliot, Ed McCully, Roger Youderian, Nate Saint, and Pete Fleming were the missionaries who tried to preach the gospel to the incredibly violent Auca Indians in Ecuador. It was well-known that the Aucas had killed many people around them, including the workers at a nearby oil company drilling site. The oil company closed their site because people were afraid to work there.

Jim Elliot and the other missionaries wanted to show the Aucas they were friendly. Nate Saint, their pilot, devised a way to lower a bucket filled with supplies to the Indians on the ground while they flew overhead. They thought this would win the Aucas' trust while keeping the missionaries safe. They began dropping gifts to the Aucas while using an amplifier to speak friendly Auca phrases. After months, the Aucas put a gift in the bucket that the missionaries could bring to their plane. Jim and the other missionaries felt the time had come to meet the Aucas face-to-face.

The five missionaries built a base a short distance from the village. After four days, an Auca man and two women appeared. The missionaries shared a meal with them, and Nate took the man up for a flight in the plane. Later, two Auca women walked out of the jungle. Tragically, as the missionaries approached these women, a group of Auca warriors killed all five heroic men on January 8th, 1956.

Although, this wasn't the end of the story. In less than two years, Jim Elliot's wife, Elisabeth Elliot, their daughter, Valerie, and Nate Saint's sister, Rachel, moved to the Auca village and continued trying to reach the Aucas. Many of them became Christians. They are now a friendly tribe with some missionaries, including Nate Saint's son and his family, continuing to live among them.

God pursued the Aucas using Jim Elliot, the four missionaries with him, and some of their family members.

While God might not pursue everyone as dramatically as he did the Aucas, he has been pursuing man since the fall. And this brings us to lesson one:

Lesson One: God pursues people.

Isaiah 59:2 Your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God.

Because we are the ones who sinned and separated ourselves from God, I would think we would then have to be the ones to pursue God. But instead, God pursues us.

We see this beginning at the fall, right after Adam and Eve ate from the tree:

Genesis 3:8 They heard the sound of the Lord God [and] hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 The Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?"

God has continued pursuing man with the gospel throughout all human history. Think of some of the common metaphors we use for the gospel to communicate God's pursuit. We say the gospel is a call to salvation:

2 Thessalonians 2:14 HE CALLED YOU THROUGH OUR GOSPEL, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He calls us to be part of his kingdom:

1 Thessalonians 2:12 Walk in a manner worthy of God, who CALLS YOU INTO HIS OWN KINGDOM AND GLORY.

A common illustration for God pursuing us is an invitation to a wedding. Think of the Parable of the Wedding Feast:

Matthew 22:1 Jesus [said] 2 “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, 3 and sent...servants to **CALL THOSE WHO WERE INVITED TO THE WEDDING FEAST, but they would not come.** 4 Again he sent...servants, saying, ‘**TELL THOSE WHO ARE INVITED...9 Go...to the main roads and INVITE TO THE WEDDING FEAST AS MANY AS YOU FIND.**’

In Luke 15, we read the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. The shepherd who pursues the lost sheep and the woman who pursues the lost coin represents God pursuing lost sinners.

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Think of the way, or ways, God pursued you:

- Maybe it was through a friendly neighbor
- Maybe it was through a gospel tract
- Maybe it was through a coworker, in my case it was fellow teachers
- Maybe it was through the Christian family God graciously placed you in, and as a result, you’ve heard the gospel as long as you can remember.

Whatever the case, these are all ways God pursues us, calling us through the gospel, and inviting us to be part of his kingdom:

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This morning, we are continuing an account we started last week: the parable of the vineyard owner. This might be the most dramatic illustration of God pursuing people in all Scripture. God sends servant after servant after servant, until he finally decides to send his Son.

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Let me remind you of the context for this parable. The religious leaders just finished [questioning Jesus’ authority](#). Jesus responded by preaching this parable, not to the religious leaders, but to the people to warn them about the religious leaders:

Luke 20:9 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.

This farming arrangement was common in Jesus’ day, especially around Galilee, because there were vast estates owned by foreigners who lived far away. They would give out the care of their land to local people or tenants.

We know from our sermon last Sunday in Isaiah 5, which Jesus’ listeners would also have known, that the owner is God the Father, and the vineyard is Israel.

The context tells us the tenants are religious leaders. Think of it like this: the tenants were supposed to physically care for the vineyard like the religious leaders were supposed to spiritually care for Israel.

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The owner returned to his home, but there was an understanding that in the future, he would receive fruit from the vineyard, which is what happened in the next verse:

Luke 20:10 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.

Now, we meet another character: the servants. They represent Old Testament prophets.

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The tenants, or religious leaders, didn’t plant the vineyard or buy it. They were allowed to work it because of the generous owner, but they wickedly turned against him.

The truth is, it would be hard for Jesus' listeners to believe that tenants would respond this way. The worst that tenants would do is refuse to provide the expected fruit. But these tenants beat the owner's servant and sent him back empty-handed.

The parable gets even harder to believe when we see how the owner responds:

Luke 20:11 And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed.

We read this and think, "Okay, the owner sent one servant, the tenants beat him and sent him back empty-handed, so then the owner sent a second servant."

But this doesn't make sense. Let's briefly think about what we would expect the owner to do and not do.

Assuming he's a wealthy landowner, he probably has servants that live with him. If he was as wealthy as Abraham, perhaps he even had a standing army, like Abraham had. He takes some of his servants, or his standing army, and he goes to the vineyard and teaches the tenants a lesson.

A more reasonable or expected response would be simply to go to the authorities. Listen to this:

Luke 12:13 Someone in the crowd said to [Jesus], "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." 14 But he said to him, "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?"

The man addressing Jesus took his issue to the wrong person. Jesus goes on to say this wasn't why he came. But we can see that it was common to take injustices – in this case a man who claimed to be ripped off by his brother – to the authorities for help.

Think about the parable of the persistent widow:

Luke 18:3 There was a widow in that city who kept coming to [the judge] saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.'

In this parable, a woman experiencing an injustice takes it to the local judge.

The point is, the vineyard owner could have done the same, and that's what we would expect him to do.

But here's what we would NOT expect him to do: send another servant.

But that's what the owner did, and unsurprisingly, they mistreated the second servant even worse than the first.

The first servant was beaten, but the second servant was beaten and treated shamefully. I take that to mean he was mocked and ridiculed.

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So, NOW the owner will go to the authorities or take his servants or his standing army and teach the tenants a lesson. Right?

Nope!

Luke 20:12 And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out.

Do you see how these verses show the owner, or God, dramatically pursuing people?

One commentator pointed out that the word for *wounded* means grievously wounded. He was beaten even worse than the previous two servants.

And it says they cast him out. Some Bibles, such as the NIV, NASB, and amplified, say that they threw him out. The imagery is that he was beaten so badly he couldn't walk, so they dragged him to the border of the property and discarded him like trash.

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Do you also see how these servants picture Old Testament prophets? God kept sending them to the Jews, but the Jews kept rejecting them and mistreating them.

We wouldn't believe it if it wasn't recorded for us, but the prophets experienced the worst mistreatment, not from the Gentiles, but from the Jews. It is the opposite of what we would expect. The one prophet who seemed to avoid being abused was Jonah who was sent to the Ninevites, or Gentiles.

There are lots of verses I could share with you that make this point, but I will read just a few.

The prophet Jeremiah told the Jews:

Jeremiah 2:30 your children took no correction; YOUR OWN SWORD DEVOURED YOUR PROPHETS like a [ravenous] lion.

The Jews devoured their prophets the way a lion devours its prey.

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When the Jews returned from exile in Babylon, Nehemiah prayed to God:

Nehemiah 9:26 “[The Jews] were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and KILLED YOUR PROPHETS, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you.

When Jesus rebuked the religious leaders told the religious leaders, he said:

Matthew 23:34 I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom YOU WILL KILL AND CRUCIFY, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town,

When Stephen rebuked the religious leaders, he said:

Acts 7:52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One (referring to the prophets).

Paul said:

1 Thessalonians 2:15 [the Jews] killed both the Lord Jesus AND THE PROPHETS.

So, it is very fitting for these servants to represent the Old Testament prophets.

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Now consider this...

As the owner continued to send servant after servant after servant – the way God sent prophet after prophet after prophet – it says much about the tenants and how stiff-necked and rebellious they were. But I think it says even more about the owner, God, who kept sending them. And this brings us to lesson two:

Lesson Two: God is longsuffering.

The word *longsuffering* is one of those biblical words we're used to because we're Christians. But it's not common in our vernacular. The closest English word is *patient*.

The Greek word for longsuffering is *makrothymōs* (mark-rah-thoo-mose), and it is made up of the two Greek words for *long* and *temper*.

It doesn't mean God loses his temper for a long time. It means it takes a long time FOR God to lose his temper. He has a long fuse. He is willing to suffer long.

We see God's longsuffering nature, or his long fuse, in this passage. He sends servant after servant after servant, even though they continue to be mistreated, without losing his temper with the tenants.

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Before I started studying this parable two weeks ago, I didn't think of it as one that demonstrated God's mercy and compassion. But the more time I spent on it, the clearer it became just how beautifully it reveals God's patient heart to reach people:

- The owner sends one servant who gets beaten by the tenants, but the owner doesn't punish the tenants. He sends another servant.
- The second servant is beaten by the tenants, but the owner doesn't punish the tenants. He sends a third servant.
- The third servant is beaten by the tenants, but the owner still doesn't punish the tenants.

Now, before we read what he does next, I want to illustrate what's happening by reminding you of something similar that we have seen before. Briefly turn to the left four chapters to Luke 15:11. This is the familiar parable of the prodigal son.

Luke 15:11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

Jesus's listeners would never believe that a father would give his selfish, immature, rebellious son his inheritance knowing he might use it to ruin his life...which is what happened. People would have been shocked at the son's request to receive the inheritance, but they would have been even more shocked when Jesus said the father gave it to him.

So, why did Jesus preach something that was so unbelievable?

For the same reason that Jesus always used hyperbole, or exaggeration: to drive a point home. That's what's happening in this verse.

No reasonable earthly father would do this, but the father in the parable doesn't represent an earthly father. He represents God the Father:

- The father in the parable extends freedom that can be taken advantage of and used sinfully, because God the Father extends freedom to us that can be taken advantage of and used sinfully.
- The father in the parable gives the son what he wants – even to the son's detriment – because God the Father might give us what we want to our detriment.

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Now, with this in mind, turn back to Luke 20.

In the Parable of the Vineyard Owner, we see another example of a father exhibiting this same sort of absurd behavior:

Luke 20:13 Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.'

Two things about this verse really are absolutely shocking.

First, the owner doesn't seem angry. Imagine we were the owner and we sent three servants and they were all treated this way. We would be furious.

If we look at the owner's words, there's even concern instead of hostility. He says, "What shall I do? How can I reach them? They haven't listened to any of my servants yet." Even after all their rebelliousness, he still had a heart for them. Talk about pursuing long-sufferingly.

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Second, and most obviously, he sent his son. He said, "*I have an idea. I know what I can do. I will send them my beloved son.*"

It might not seem shocking to us at first because we tend to read through verses quickly without thinking much about them. But if you pause for a moment and consider what you're reading, it is shocking.

No reasonable earthly father would send his son to check on tenants who severely beat the three servants who were sent to them. In fact, sending a son would be the LAST thing a father would do.

Listen to the way [the Pulpit Commentary explains this](#): "*The parable itself is an improbable one. The conduct of the [tenants], the [longsuffering] of the vineyard owner, his last act in sending his beloved and only son. All this makes up a history without a parallel in human experience. Yet this is an exact sketch of what did actually take place in the eventful story of Israel!*"

In other words, the vineyard owner's actions have no historical basis. Yes, vineyard owners did turn over their land to tenants. Yes, they did then send servants to check on the land and get some fruit. But the Pulpit Commentary is making the point that there is no historical record of a vineyard owner ever repeatedly sending mistreated servants like this, and then sending his son.

There is no historical basis for it, because just like the father of the prodigal son doesn't picture an earthly father, the vineyard owner doesn't picture an earthly father. They both picture God the Father, and the vineyard owner's son perfectly pictures Jesus.

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And we can tell by the language in the verse, in particular the words, my beloved son, that Jesus is in view. At Jesus's baptism:

Matthew 3:17 behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is MY BELOVED SON, with whom I am well pleased."

At the Transfiguration...

Luke 9:35 a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is MY BELOVED SON, listen to him."

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So, how do the tenants respond to even this incredible demonstration of love, patience, and compassion? Would they actually go so far as to beat the vineyard owner's son too...or is that where even they would draw the line?

Luke 20:14 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.' **Luke 20:15a** And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Pause here.

The tenants' wickedness reached an all-time high with this decision. They didn't even talk about murdering the servants that had been sent to them. But now they decide to murder the beloved son.

They represent the religious leaders well.

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What could the tenants have been thinking?

Numerous commentaries made the point the point that under certain circumstances, if the owner died without an heir, whoever was first to claim the estate, typically the tenants, could have it.

That makes sense, right? If there is nobody to claim the land, then shouldn't it go to the people who already live and work there?

So, they believe that by killing the heir they will get the inheritance themselves. And that does seem to be what they say in the verse: **“Let us kill him, SO THAT THE INHERITANCE MAY BE OURS.”**

Notice that even though they knew he was the owner's son, they didn't refer to him that way. They said, **“This is the heir,”** versus, “This is the son,” because they want what belongs to him.

This also makes them sound like the religious leaders who were jealous of Jesus and wanted what belonged to him; in particular, the praise and attention he received.

Pilate recognized this when Jesus was on trial before him:

Matthew 27:18 [Pilate] knew that it was OUT OF ENVY (or jealousy) that they delivered [Jesus] up.

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Now, because the vineyard owner had been so long-suffering up to this point when all the servants were mistreated, will he respond similarly when his son is murdered?

Luke 20:15b What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16a He will come and destroy those tenants

Go ahead and pause right here. This is as far as we can get this week. There's too much in the rest of verse 16.

The owner sure looked long-suffering. Until now.

I stand by my earlier lesson that this parable reveals how long-suffering God is. But this parable also reveals that God's long-suffering has limits.

And this brings us to lesson three:

Lesson Three: God's long-suffering comes to an end.

Talk about a 180. The owner just went from:

“I will send one servant, and another, and another. That didn't work. What shall I do? How can I reach the tenants because they haven't listened to any of my servants yet? Oh, I know, I will send my son!”

To:

“I am going to destroy those tenants.”

God is long-suffering and can put up with a lot, but we see what he doesn't put up with: rejecting his son.

If you write in your Bible, you can circle the words “destroy those tenants,” draw a line, and write Psalm 2:12:

Psalm 2:12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and you perish in the way, for his wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

This verse captures one of the main points of the parable of the vineyard owner: you better honor the vineyard owner's Son. If you reject him, as the verse says, **"You perish in the way"** and **"His wrath is quickly kindled."**

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Think about this...

The religious leaders thought they pleased God. They were so proud they believed they were God's greatest servants: "God must be more pleased with us than the rest of the Jews combined."

But Jesus preached this parable ABOUT THEM to warn people that by rejecting Jesus, the religious leaders were causing God to feel the same way toward the religious leaders that the vineyard owner felt toward the tenants. And he wanted to destroy them.

This would have been shocking to Jesus' listeners. Many of them thought nobody was BETTER than the religious leaders.

But it drives home how God feels about anyone who reject his Son.

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Let me close with this:

2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV) The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but IS LONGSUFFERING TOWARD US, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

God is longsuffering, but for this reason: so we can repent and be saved.

Let's not presume on God's mercy or take it for granted.

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If you have any questions, or I can pray for you in any way, I'll be up front after service, and I'd consider it a privilege to be able to speak with you.

Let's pray.