

February 23, 2020
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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TRYING TO SILENCE THE REAL AUTHORITY **Luke 20:9-19**

I remember the day, March 30, 1981 when a troubled kid named John Hinkley Jr. shot President Reagan. The good news is that the assassination attempt failed. The bad news is that, in the confusion that followed, Secretary of State Al Haig made a fool of himself on worldwide television. Vice-President Bush was on his way back from Texas when the event unfolded. There was no protocol in place at the White House to address this particular situation. Therefore, either by appointment or more likely by his own volition, Haig called a press conference and announced, “I, Al Haig, am in control here at the White House.” His arrogant assumption betrayed a complete lapse in basic understanding of the Constitution.

But let’s not be too hard on Mr. Haig. He simply gave public expression of the same kind of problem with which most of us struggle. Thinking that I am in charge, wanting to be in charge, pretending that I am in charge is an attitude that has plagued us since our original mother and father demonstrated the same lack of understanding.

Satan was the first created being to make this blunder in judgment. He decided that he didn’t appreciate the incredible glory and majesty with which his Creator had endowed him. He wanted more, which meant that he had to attempt to replace his Creator. He failed miserably. In his failed state Satan determined to influence every angel and human God created to follow his foolish path of rebellion. So, Eve listened to Satan and decided she wanted to be in charge. And Adam listened to Eve and Satan and acted like he was in charge.

That brings us to this part of Luke’s story about the King who is really in charge. King Jesus came to earth to pay sin’s penalty by shedding His own blood as the price. Throughout His life, He was pressing on toward that goal. Now, the King was near the end of the journey. He was in Jerusalem ready to fulfill what the Old Testament prophets had promised, what John the Baptist had promised, and what He Himself had promised. He was about to be killed by the religious rulers in Jerusalem.

The sad part is that the rulers actually thought they were in control. They didn’t like Jesus. They had not liked Jesus since He began His public ministry. They didn’t like Jesus because He always spoke the truth. The truth hurt because it uncovered their sin and hypocrisy. Therefore, they concluded they would have to take extreme action in order to quench this “Light,” cover the “Truth,” and silence this Living Word of God that continued to bring up damning evidence against them.

But those rulers were not in charge of life anymore than we are. We, like them, have been given life and more blessings than we can imagine by our owner and Creator. In spite of His manifold blessings, we reject His control over our lives and are determined to do what we want to do, achieve what we want to achieve, and do it in our chosen way. We will decide what is good and right for us. And in the process, we are much like the scribes and Pharisees who resisted King Jesus’ control.

Therefore, the parable that Jesus told about those very rulers is a story that we should listen to carefully. The parable answers the principal men’s question about Jesus’ authority. There is much to learn in this story about God our owner, Jesus our Savior, and ourselves who think we can own God’s vineyard, which is our lives.

The Vineyard Owner’s Patience (vv.9-12).

A common statement in the story about King Jesus is that He began to tell a parable. *And he began to tell the people this parable (v.9a).* A chief characteristic of Jesus’ parables is that they always revealed truth. That was His purpose in telling them. But the truth was not obvious to all. That is another of His purposes in using parables.

There came a definite time in His public ministry when Jesus taught in parables. Mark wrote, *With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it. He did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything (Mark 4:33-34)*. Beginning with His announcement of sins forgiven for the lame man in Capernaum (Matthew 9), and His claim to equality with God the Father (Matthew 11), Jesus received much resistance. When it became obvious that the rulers and many of the people rejected Him and His teaching, Jesus began to teach in parables so that *seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand (Matthew 13:13)*.

The truth was always right there in the story. But the listeners were often so focused on the story they couldn't grasp the truth. Or generally they were, like us, so focused on their own needs and desires that they were deaf to truth. It is a reminder that apart from God's grace, the people were deaf to the truth.

In His parables, Jesus always told earthly stories. Such is the case in the text before us. The people, and especially the principal men, were familiar with this story and its source. This story flowed from God's message to rebels in Isaiah's day (Isaiah 5:1-7). According to that song, God built a vineyard, working diligently to clear the stones, cultivate it, and plant choice vines (vv.1-2). He built a watchtower and wine vat (v.2). The vineyard should have produced good fruit, but instead it produced wild grapes (v.2). What more could God have done for His vineyard (v.4)? Finally, God removed the protection and let the enemies trample His vineyard (v.5). God let the thorns overrun it and gave it over to drought (v.6).

Then God gave this explanation of the song: *For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are his pleasant planting; and he looked for justice, but behold, bloodshed; for righteousness, but behold, an outcry! (Isaiah 5:7)*. Most of the people present that day, and especially the rulers, would have been familiar with this song from Isaiah.

Now let's look at the story Jesus told that had roots in Isaiah's song. It was a story about wicked tenants and how the owner of the vineyard expected payment from tenants. *"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" (vv.9b-10).

This part of the story actually conveyed a common situation. Vineyards were a staple part of Israel's economy. Everyone was aware of even the details of vineyard work. In this story, a man expended much effort to plant a vineyard. Matthew filled in some of the details about Jesus' explanation of the man's work. *"There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country"* (Matthew 21:33).

It was also not unusual that the vineyard owner would lease it to tenants. He would work with the vineyard until it was producing, then lease it out to tenants. The expectation was for the tenants to pay for the lease by giving the owner an agreed upon portion of the harvest. This freed up the owner to travel. It was not unusual for a wealthy man to have multiple vineyards like this that he would lease to tenants. The vineyard owner had every right to expect the tenants to pay the agreed price. Such an owner might live in another town with his servants. To that end, the vineyard owner sent His servants who represented his authority.

But Jesus did not simply tell a story about a vineyard owner being mistreated by wicked tenants. This story is about God's vineyard. Many of the details sound like Isaiah's song. Jesus was teaching the people, and especially the leaders, that God had created the nation. Israel was God's vineyard and the leaders were responsible to manage it for God's glory. They did not do right.

So in the story, Jesus told how the tenants responded wickedly. *"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"* (vv.10b-12). It is a sad story. Instead of keeping their obligation and paying the agreed price for the lease, the tenants beat the owner's representative. They did the same thing to a second and a third representative. Anyone would conclude at this point that the vineyard owner was a very patient man.

The sadder reality is in the fulfillment of the story. The Old Testament Jewish leaders (kings and priests) did this to God's messengers. Again this is the story about God's nation Israel. God

had every right to expect that the priests (which position He created), the rulers, the leaders of the people would lead them in right worship of Him. Instead they tried to wrest the nation from God's hand to lead it for their own glory. God sent messenger after messenger to challenge the leaders to do right.

We call those messengers prophets and many of their messages are recorded in the Old Testament. And most of those messengers were rejected, many beaten, and some killed. The writer to Hebrew Christians described them like this: *And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets – who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated – of whom the world was not worthy – wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth (Hebrews 11:32-38).*

Religious people still do this. A modern generation of religious people do not even flinch to hear such history, such abuse of God's messengers. Much of the reason for that is the unwavering focus on humanity. The major religion of our age is humanism. Its foundational premise is that man is the measure of all things. The mantra of humanism might sound like a twisting of Ecclesiastes 12:13: "Let us hear the conclusion of the matter. Respect humanity, love yourself and be true to your own desires and dreams. For you are responsible to see that you are pampered."

The most astonishing reality is that this ideology is rampant in so-called Christian organizations and churches. Humanity refuses to hear the truth from God's Word, having concluded that it is negative, unkind, and even qualifies as hate speech.

The Vineyard Owner's Resolve (vv.13-16).

Jesus told about the tenants' extreme wickedness. When the tenants beat his servants, the owner decided to send his own son. Hear the words of verse thirteen: *Then the owner of the vineyard said, "What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him" (v.13).* That sounds so much like Isaiah's song where God asked, *"What more was there to do for my vineyard?" (Isaiah 5:4).* To send his son was an extreme conclusion for the vineyard owner. But it does seem logical that no one would represent the vineyard owner's authority better than his own Son.

Because this is a story about God's vineyard, His Son is obviously Jesus Christ. Jesus had already made this connection for the religious rulers and they were livid when they heard it. They wanted to destroy Jesus for claiming that He was God's Son.

In the story, the tenants thought they could own the vineyard. *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 (vv.14-15a).* How did they think that by killing the heir the owner would give them possession of the vineyard? Sinful thinking is always skewed because Satan, the author of sin, is a the chief of liars.

And the leaders who heard Jesus that day were guilty of this very thing. They did steal God's nation Israel and used it for their own purposes. That reality was obvious partly from the merchants who were in the temple. That is why they feared a revolt from the people, who represented the nation, who were God's vineyard.

Coming to the end of the parable, Jesus posed a question to the people, but especially to the principal men. *"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?" (v.15b).* It was a rhetorical question, according to Luke's account, because the Lord Himself gave the answer or solution to the problem. *"He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others" (v.16).* According to Matthew, the authorities agreed that this was the justifiable response. In Matthew's account the authorities answered, *He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons (Matthew 21:41).*

It is odd how sinners think that rash punishment for sin is okay as long as they are unaware that they are the culprits. We are by nature such hypocrites.

Suddenly, everything changed. The principal men's reaction, *when they heard this, they said, "Surely not!" (v.16b)*. Finally the truth dawned on the listeners. Luke used a verb (*akouo*) where our English has the word "heard." The verb means more than just to hear a sound or words. The idea is to listen to, to perceive (see v.19b), to comprehend or understand. How did it happen that suddenly they comprehended what Jesus was saying? At this moment God gave them spiritual insight so that they actually realized the truth. Apart from God's grace, the norm was *"seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (Matthew 13:13)*.

By God's grace, the leaders were convicted by what they understood. We need to understand what they understood. Hearing with comprehension, the rulers realized that Jesus had just promised that God would destroy them and all their fellow "Christ-rejecters" and give the "kingdom" (vineyard) to other people (specifically us Gentiles). Surely not!

The Parable's Point (vv.17-19).

Jesus told the story in order to establish the authority of the "rejected Stone." This was His answer to their demand, *"Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority" (Luke 20:2)*. Jesus explained that the heir to the vineyard in the story is the promised "rejected stone" of Scripture. *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'?" (v.17)*.

Jesus quoted from their Scriptures over which they had become authorities. *The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone (Psalm 118:22, Daniel 2:34)*. To this day, religious people trip over the Chief Cornerstone of God's building. He who is the standard of righteousness, the measuring line for the "House of God," has become the point of stumbling for everyone who rejects Him.

The Rejected Stone has supreme authority because *"Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him" (v.18)*. There is only one acceptable response to Jesus the stone. Peter wrote, *For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame" (1 Peter 2:6)*. All religions apart from the Christian religion offer a substitute for Jesus. To accept a substitute is to reject Jesus, which is to stumble. The ultimate result of disbelieving Jesus is to be crushed by Him in final judgment.

People who hear that verdict are often not very happy. That is especially true when the sinner perceives the truth about Jesus. That was the perception of the human authorities in this case. Those sinners understood the Lord's teaching very well, *For they perceived that he had told this parable against them (v.19b)*. Once again (as in the case of *heard*, v.16), God allowed the sinners to be under conviction of their sin.

But instead of appreciating Jesus' love for them, the needy sinners took offense to it. They desired to silence conviction. *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 (v.19)*.

The rulers desired to get rid of Jesus at that moment. In fact, they had wanted to silence Jesus from the beginning of His public ministry. At the outset of His ministry Jesus cleaned out the temple, the rulers asked Him to show a sign of authority, and Jesus responded with evidence that He knew they intended to kill Him. *Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19)*. Early in His ministry Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath and *The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him (Mark 3:6)*.

Therefore, after a certain point, Jesus often reminded His followers that the authorities were going to kill Him. While in Caesarea Philippi, *From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised (Matthew 16:21)*. After the transfiguration Jesus promised the same thing (Matthew 17:22-23). Just a few days before entering

Jerusalem Jesus promised it again, *And after flogging him, they will kill him, and on the third day he will rise (Luke 18:33).*

There were no surprises about the rulers' intent. The religious rulers thought they were in charge and could extinguish the Light of Truth at their will. But they could not even apprehend God the Son because of the people. Yes, but in just a couple of days they would apprehend Jesus, they would take Him to the governor, and the people did not rebel but joined in the demand for the Light to be extinguished. How do we explain that? King Jesus was in charge. Wicked sinners do not silence the Truth, extinguish the Light, or close up the Way. When Jesus is not seen, heard, or known, it is according to His own work for His glory.

Make no mistake, when you come under conviction because of the truth of the Bible, that is King Jesus' control of circumstances in your life. When you do not sense conviction, even though you have heard God's perfect Word, that too is because of Jesus' control. Never presume that you can determine or control conviction of sin. That matter of control is far above your ability.

Also, never presume that you control your own destiny and can use God according to your own purposes and desires. You don't own the vineyard. God illustrated His incredible patience for many years with the Jewish nation. But when God set them aside as a nation, His action has been irrevocable. So, too, when you hear Jesus speak through His Word, do not resist to your own hurt. Rather, respond in humble submission to His will.