

Scripture Reading:

Luke 20:9 “9 Then [Jesus] began to tell the people this parable:

"A certain man planted a vineyard, leased it to vinedressers, and went into a far country for a long time. 10 Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that they might give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the vinedressers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 Again he sent another servant; and they beat him also, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. 12 And again he sent a third; and they wounded him also and cast him out.

13 Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son. Probably they will respect him when they see him.' 14 But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.' 15 So they cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16 He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others." And when they heard it they said, "Certainly not!" 17 Then He looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone'? 18 "Whoever falls on that stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

19 And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people -- for they knew He had spoken this parable against them.”

"Wickedness in the Land"

Well I am sure there are many who suspect that I chose this sermon title because of the upcoming inauguration on Tuesday! Such is not the case: I am saving my comments about the new administration for next week when we study the question of paying taxes to Caesar!

Last week we saw Jesus confronted by the religious leaders questioning His authority... Now Jesus turns to the people who are present and tells them a damning parable which those same leaders quickly understood was aimed directly at them!

This passage brings together the theme of wickedness in the land on many fronts this morning:

- It is our text from Luke, where Jesus confronts the wickedness of these religious leaders who were about to kill the Son of God
- It relates to the next event in the Christmas story, which we come to at this time of the year, where King Herod slaughters the young children around Bethlehem in an attempt to kill the baby Jesus

- **And finally, it comes on the Sunday where some churches throughout America confront the wickedness in our land by once again denouncing the Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion-on-demand resulting in the death of some 50 million of our children... *Why we are singing and praying the imprecatory Psalms today!***

And of course the Lord added to the weight of all this by making sure that my morning devotions brought me to the Prophet Jeremiah for the past few weeks as well! Now I don't want this to be overly depressing this morning, but it should be easy to see a pattern here:

- **The religious leaders are going to kill the Son of God because it is inconvenient for them to have Jesus disrupting the Temple and questioning their leadership**
- **King Herod wanted to kill the Son of God because His coming as his rival was troubling to him and all of Jerusalem!**
- **And today, our unborn children who are made in the image of God are killed in the womb because they are inconvenient and troubling to those who want to do things their way!**

In each case someone has to die so that someone else can have what they want!

The Proverbs that we should be studying this month teach us that fools love death and that the desire of the treacherous is violence.

- **Again, this is a truth that we see played out in history from Genesis to Revelation.**

When Cain saw that God was pleased with the sacrifice of his brother and had rejected his own, the answer was simple and deadly: He murdered his brother!

When Pharaoh was troubled by the Hebrews, he first tried to eliminate them by having the midwives kill their newborn children and EVEN after all of God's judgments, in the end he rides out with his army with the intent of slaughtering all of the Hebrews in the desert.

King David resorted to murder to cover his adultery with Bathsheba

- **David repented and was forgiven, but the results of these sins could be seen in the history of his family for many generations.**

Moving on to the wicked Kings of both Israel and Judah, we see them doing what our nation has done, when they sacrificed God's children on the altars of Molech in order to secure, in their minds, the peace and affluence they desired at any cost.

King Herod's slaughter of the children at Bethlehem is a part of the Christmas account that is not pleasant to focus on, but it is a vivid reminder that fools love death!

Even in the closing moments of history given in the Book of Revelation, we see wicked men, under the influence of Satan, who has been released again for a short time, gathering to wage war against Christ's Church.

Proverbs reminds us many times that Lady folly brings death while Lady Wisdom brings life. BUT, Lady Wisdom is not a pacifist!

- Death is God's judgment on man's fall from grace and not something that man invented to trouble God!
- God's Law includes various capital offenses!

The point in Proverbs, which we see throughout all of the Bible, is that we have two paths:

-- With man's wisdom we have death leading unto death, and final judgment -- In the end, death and hell are cast into the Lake of Fire along with all those whose names were not written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

-- With God's Wisdom, the death of His own Son pays the price for sin, propitiating His wrath and bringing man back to life and fellowship with God: Where those who have been washed in the blood of Christ will celebrate with Him through all eternity at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb!

- With man we have death leading unto death
- With God we have death leading unto life!

It could strike us as humorous, if it were not so sad, when we see atheists like Christopher Hutchins attack the violence of Christianity!

If you have heard any of his debates or interviews, Chris loves to get all emotional about how CRUEL it would be for God to take His Son and crucify Him on a cross because of what someone else had done [*you see Chris does 'intellectually understand' the Gospel, and yet he mocks it*]

It takes a much BIGGER faith than God requires of us to believe that we can find anywhere in man's history a better alternative!

- The death and destruction brought by the godless humanists in just the 20th Century alone should sober any skeptic
- But without God's grace, man only hardens in his sin even when the truth is made clear as it is in our passage from Luke and as many have done for Chris.

Jesus in our account this morning is dealing directly with the religious leaders in Jerusalem and warning them about the coming destruction of the Temple and their 'kingdom.'

Because we have fools who love death throughout all of history, it should be easy to make applications for our time where the leaders of our land have once again put

their priorities ahead of the Lord's priorities! We are told in the text, that Jesus turns and tells this parable to all who are present, but the religious leaders did NOT miss who it was aimed at:

"19 And the chief priests and the scribes that very hour sought to lay hands on Him, but they feared the people -- for they knew He had spoken this parable against them."

- **So we have a parable that was aimed at the Pharisees and Sadducees, spoken to the people present and heard by the disciples of Jesus!**
- **Again, if we knew our Bibles well, we would know that Jesus did not just pick a random agricultural parable to make His point & why these leaders saw it was obviously aimed at them:**

God often referred to His nation as a vineyard, as we see in Psalm 80:

"8 You have brought a vine out of Egypt; You have cast out the nations, and planted it. 9 You prepared room for it, And caused it to take deep root, And it filled the land."

Israel is a vineyard that often had problems as we see in Isaiah chapter five, where the prophet describes a beautiful vineyard planted by Jehovah and then concludes in verse seven: " the vineyard of Jehovah of hosts is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help."

God has poured out His blessings and rather than respond with thankful hearts and service, His people are thankless and selfish. God has been patience but now that patience is at an end...

- **When Jesus asks what should be done with such wicked servants, the answer is obvious, but not easy to face.**

We have the same problem today when we ask what God should do with a covenant people who have sacrificed over 50 million children on the altar of personal peace & affluence.

- **Jesus says "He will come and destroy those vinedressers and give the vineyard to others."**

The reaction of the people is not unexpected when they said, "Certainly not!" Jesus reminds them that this conclusion which is hard to face had been predicted in the very Psalm which the crowds quoted during His triumphal into Jerusalem

Psalm 118: "19 Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go through them, And I will praise Jehovah. 20 This is the gate of Jehovah, Through which the righteous shall enter. 21 I will praise You, For You have answered me, And have become my

salvation. 22 The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. 23 This was Jehovah's doing; It is marvelous in our eyes."

- These false shepherds of Israel had missed their day of visitation: The day of salvation & were going to kill the Messiah in short order
- The rock who is the cornerstone of the Kingdom of God would become a stumbling block and crush His enemies! *[Explain concept of a cornerstone]*
- So how does this warning and pending judgment on the Nation of Israel apply to us today?

Is it just Old Testament stuff that does not apply to the Church age?

I hope we have covered that topic enough to know how foolish that choice is!

Since our churches today are in much worse shape and there is much blood crying out to God from our land... Is all lost? Perhaps and perhaps not...

- This is where the wisdom and instruction that God gives us as His people is so important.
- Paul says quite clearly that the history of God's people is given for OUR benefit – our instruction!

If we want to understand how we are to respond while living in a land full of much wickedness we must learn the lessons from that history and Psalm 106 can be a good place to start as we consider the impact of the sin of abortion on our land...

- *The Psalmist begins where we must each week, with proper worship:*

Psalm 106 “1 Praise Jehovah! Oh, give thanks to Jehovah, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. 2 Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can declare all His praise? 3 Blessed are those who keep justice, And he who does righteousness at all times! 4 Remember me, O Jehovah, with the favor You have toward Your people; Oh, visit me with Your salvation, 5 That I may see the benefit of Your chosen ones, That I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation, That I may glory with Your inheritance.

- *The Psalmist also knows that he cannot approach God without proper confession of sin*

6 “We have sinned with our fathers, We have committed iniquity, We have done wickedly.

- *Then he remembers lessons from the history of God's people, OUR history, the lessons that Paul says are written for OUR benefit!*

7 “Our fathers in Egypt did not understand Your wonders; They did not remember the multitude of Your mercies, But rebelled by the sea--the Red Sea.”

- *These people see all of God's miracles and judgments, they celebrate the Passover, they are set free and yet they quickly become a faithless people*
- *How can they be SO stupid... Paul's point is we should just look in the mirror to get that answer!*

8 “Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake, That He might make His mighty power known. 9 He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it dried up; So He led them through the depths, As through the wilderness. 10 He saved them from the hand of him who hated them, And redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. 11 The waters covered their enemies; There was not one of them left. 12 Then they believed His words; They sang His praise.”

- *Their sins are forgiven by God's grace and their enemies are destroyed utterly*
- *We see a clear pattern that is repeated in their history: They fall into sin, they repent, and then God forgives and blesses them!*

13 “They soon forgot His works; They did not wait for His counsel, 14 But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, And tested God in the desert. 15 And He gave them their request, But sent leanness into their soul. 16 When they envied Moses in the camp, And Aaron the saint of the Jehovah, 17 The earth opened up and swallowed Dathan, And covered the faction of Abiram. 18 A fire was kindled in their company; The flame burned up the wicked. 19 They made a calf in Horeb, And worshiped the molded image. 20 Thus they changed their glory Into the image of an ox that eats grass. 21 They forgot God their Savior, Who had done great things in Egypt, 22 Wondrous works in the land of Ham, Awesome things by the Red Sea. 23 Therefore He said that He would destroy them, Had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, To turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them.”

- *God's mercy thru an advocate reminding us of the importance of prayer and of right worship!*

24 “Then they despised the pleasant land; They did not believe His word, 25 But complained in their tents, And did not heed the voice of Jehovah. 26 Therefore He raised up His hand in an oath against them, To overthrow them in the wilderness, 27 To overthrow their descendants among the nations, And to scatter them in the lands.”

- *Here we should remember God's faithfulness to His remnant as He later blesses Joshua and Caleb!*

28 “They joined themselves also to Baal of Peor, And ate sacrifices made to the dead. 29 Thus they provoked Him to anger with their deeds, And the plague broke out among them. 30 Then Phinehas stood up and intervened, And the plague was stopped. 31 And that was accounted to him for righteousness to all generations forevermore.”

- *Another advocate stands in the gap bringing an end to judgment and a blessing for his family*

32 “They angered Him also at the waters of strife, So that it went ill with Moses on account of them; 33 Because they rebelled against His Spirit, So that he spoke rashly with his lips.”

- *Even the patience of Moses is tested with this people!*
- *Remembering that ALL of this is given for our instruction, consider how they then served God when they entered the Land of Milk & Honey*

34 “They did not destroy the peoples, Concerning whom the Lord had commanded them, 35 But they mingled with the Nations And learned their works; 36 They served their idols, Which became a snare to them. 37 They even sacrificed their sons And their daughters to demons, 38 And shed innocent blood, The blood of their sons and daughters, Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; And the land was polluted with blood. 39 Thus they were defiled by their own works, And played the harlot by their own deeds.”

- *I don't think it is very hard to make the case that this is where we are today in this once Christian nation that has turned its back on God and sacrificed our children to the idols of riches and pleasure!*
- *As a result, what follows should surely cause us to tremble...*

40 “Therefore the wrath of Jehovah was kindled against His people, So that He abhorred His own inheritance. 41 And He gave them into the hand of the nations, And those who hated them ruled over them. 42 Their enemies also oppressed them, And they were brought into subjection under their hand. 43 Many times He delivered them; But they rebelled in their counsel, And were brought low for their iniquity.”

- *There are REAL consequences to sin and rebellion, but we serve a most merciful Father...*

44 “Nevertheless He regarded their affliction, When He heard their cry; 45 And for their sake He remembered His covenant, And relented according to the multitude of His mercies. 46 He also made them to be pitied By all those who carried them away captive. 47 Save us, O Jehovah our God, And gather us from among the nations, To give thanks to Your holy name, To triumph in Your praise. 48 Blessed be Jehovah the God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise Jehovah!”

It is not difficult to paint a dire picture of where we are in America today, but we must remember these lessons from history and trust in the God of our salvation!

This means we must choose carefully where our allegiances will be:

- **If they lie with men, we will see death leading to death**
- **If they lie with God then, as we remember at this Table each Lord's Day, the death of Christ has led to life: Jesus said I have come to give them life and life abundantly**

This is the message that we boldly proclaim to our culture of death!

Communion Meditation:

Proverbs 4:17 "For they eat the bread of wickedness, And drink the wine of violence.

4:18 But the path of the righteous is as the dawning light, That shines more and more unto the perfect day."

Proverbs 12:28 "28 In the way of righteousness is life, And in its pathway there is no death."