

**Scattered Like Dust**  
Luke 20:9-18 (07-19-2020)  
Ernie Godshall  
Faith Bible Church  
Evansville, IN

History is full of tragic moments. The Bubonic plague in the 1300s killed at least half of the population of Europe, probably the worst pandemic in history. The communist revolutions in Russia, China, Cambodia and other places resulted in the slaughter and deaths of untold millions. WW-I and II brought death to millions more. Nazi Germany gassed and slaughtered millions of Jews in the Holocaust. You can probably think of many more great tragedies of history. But none is so tragic as Israel's history of apostasy and idolatry that went on for 1500 years ending in the murder of their own Messiah and then the horrendous destruction of their own temple and city of Jerusalem in AD 70.

The pages of the Old Testament are full of the shame of Israel's turning her back on God, her great Redeemer. Already in the wilderness they danced around the golden calf. Judges is the account of one apostasy after another as God raised up deliverers to bring them back to their senses and back to God. Throughout the times of the kings she turned to Baal and Molech, even burning their own babies in their insane idolatry. She went so far from God that God had to whistle for the Assyrians in 722 BC to take the northern tribes captive. Then 150 years later in 586 BC God brought the Babylonians to destroy the temple in Jerusalem and take Judah herself into captivity for 70 years. Even when they returned to their land, many followed their own lusts and desires. Ezra and Nehemiah were forlorn with Israel's wickedness. The 400 silent years between the Old and New Testaments were no better.

And now Jesus has come to save His people from their sins. He is the Christ, the Son of David and Son of God, truly God and truly man. But from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, the leaders of Israel hated Him out of jealousy and envy and plotted to kill Him. As we come into the final week before His crucifixion, the hatred and tension is mounting ever higher. In our passage in Luke 20, Jesus is teaching the people in Herod's very spacious temple. It was Passover week so the temple was filled with thousands of hearers and the leaders are getting desperate to get rid of Him.

In Luke 20:9-18 Jesus tells a story that only escalated that hatred even more. By the time He ends His story about the vineyard and the vine-growers, the leaders know He is talking straight to them. Verse 19 says, "They understood that they spoke this parable against them."

As we make our way through this parable of the wicked tenants, let's note who is represented. First, the Owner of the vineyard is God the Father. The vineyard is Israel; we know that from Isaiah 5 and other places in the Old Testament. The tenants or vine-growers are Israel's leaders, elders, priests, those responsible to give the people spiritual guidance. The servants are prophets God sent over and over to Israel to call them to repentance. Israel mistreated many; some they actually killed. They basically tried to put a gag order on God's spokesmen. Here is one of many passages from Jeremiah.

*Jeremiah 7:25 25 Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending them.*

And so Jesus tells this powerful story to the people, intending it especially for the leaders.

**God planted Israel as a vineyard.**

*Luke 20:9 And He began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey for a long time."*

The Bible has various places where God speaks of Israel as His vineyard. The clearest is in Isaiah 5.  
*Isa 5:1-2 Let me sing now for my well-beloved A song of my beloved concerning His vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hill. 2 He dug it all around, removed its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. And He built a tower in the middle of it And also hewed out a wine vat in it;*

*Then He expected it to produce good grapes, But it produced only worthless ones.*

The long journey at the end of Luke 20:9 is the 1500 years from the Exodus to this very time. God took Israel out of Egypt around 1500 BC, led them and cared for them through the wilderness, and then planted them in the Promised Land. He expected them to glorify Him among the nations, but that's not what happened. The kings, elders, priests and Levites were to give them spiritual guidance, but instead they led them into horrific idolatry.

God in His good providence has blessed us as a nation with freedom like no other nation in history, but we too have turned to gross idolatry, madly pursuing our own lusts and desires and completely forgetting about the God who made us. We can see ourselves mirrored here as well. We as God's children are God's vineyard. He planted us in this world to bring Him glory.

**God sent His prophets to call them to repentance.** In verses 10 through 12 we have a thumbnail sketch of all the prophets God raised up and sent to preach His word and call the people to repentance. How did Israel receive them?

*Luke 20:10-12 At the harvest time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, so that they would give him some of the produce (fruit) of the vineyard; but the vine-growers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11 And he proceeded to send another slave; and they beat him also and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. 12 And he proceeded to send a third; and this one also they wounded and cast out.*

This was the history of Israel's treatment of God's servants the prophets. They told them to go away. "We don't want to hear you!" They beat them severely, thrashing them, treating them shamefully, and wounding them. They threw Jeremiah into a muddy cistern. Tradition says King Manasseh had Isaiah cut in half with a saw. As the scribes and chief priests are listening, they know He's aiming this story straight at their wicked hearts. They would have killed Him right away, but the people standing around would have stoned them. Plus, God's time had not yet come. We have to wait a couple days. But they will get Him.

How important it is for any people to listen to God's messengers as they bring the truths of God's Word! Satan is constantly trying to gag God's voice with false teachers and false teaching. The purity of the Gospel is always under attack. You can trace this battle for the truth through church history as well. The 1500s was the century of the Reformation, but cold orthodoxy set in very shortly. God brought the Puritans in the 1600s, but again by 1700 England and the churches had descended into moral and spiritual corruption. God raised up the Wesleys and George Whitefield to call the people in England and America back to God. In the 1800s God used the great preacher Spurgeon to call the people to the cross, but by the end of his life he faced the Downgrade Controversy where liberalism from Germany had already swept into the churches. The 1900s saw the Fundamentalist Movement in America fighting for the faith against modernism and the social gospel. Satan is always pushing the churches away from the truth. Psychology crept into the pulpits in the second half of the 1900s. Then God raised up people like Jay Adams to keep us focused on the sufficiency of Scripture. The church continues to cave into the cultural influences and pressures. We thank God for men like John MacArthur, whose world-wide ministry has done untold good for God's people. And the battle continues. Man naturally drifts away from the purity of the gospel into apostasy.

**God sent His Son as His final Messenger,** and it ended in the greatest crime of all time.

*Luke 20:13-15 The owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.' 14 But when the vine-growers saw him, they reasoned with one another, saying, 'This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance will be ours.' 15 So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do to them?*

Don't get the idea that God wasn't sure what to do. As Jesus tells this story, He knows all of this is fulfilling God's redemptive plan. They had treated the other prophets shamefully, so what will they do with the Son? We have echoes of Jacob's twelve sons plotting to kill his special son Joseph when they saw him coming with his special coat.

As we've seen throughout Luke, the leaders are constantly plotting and trying to figure out how to get rid of Jesus. The vine-growers of the parable reasoned as they saw the heir coming, "Let's get rid of him and the inheritance will be ours." How foolish. How insane. Sin makes men foolish and stupid. Did they think the owner had died? Surely he would return, but their reason was gone. So they throw the beloved son out of the vineyard and murder him. Unbelievable.

Jesus challenges them. What should the owner do to them? Matthew records the people saying, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper time." Luke says –

*Luke 20:16 He will come and destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others. When they heard it, they said, "May it never be!"*

Did you see "May it never be?" That's the same little phrase Paul uses in Romans 6:1, "Should we continue in sin that grace may abound? May it never be!" Don't even think of parking there! Horrors no! These Israelite leaders can't believe their ears. They are shocked. This couldn't happen to the sons of Abraham. We are the chosen nation. They couldn't imagine losing their position of privilege.

Who are the "others" in verse 16? They are Jesus followers! They are the fishermen like Peter and John, a tax collector like Matthew, people who are basically considered nobodies in that culture. Jesus will even promise them they would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:30). They would become the apostles and leaders of the church in Acts and following. They would be the Philips and the Stephens and the Gentiles like Titus. God was going to take the privileged status from Israel and give it to the followers of Jesus, just common men filled with the Spirit leading the church of Christ.

### **Christ fulfilled the Messianic prophecy of Psalm 118.**

#### **The rejected Stone**

*Luke 20:17 But Jesus looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written: 'THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone'?"*

Notice the first five words of verse 17. "Jesus looked at them." The word indicates He fixed His piercing gaze directly on them. In Exodus 14:24-25, when God led Israel through the Red Sea and the Egyptians were chasing them it says "The Lord looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion." Here the Lord looked at them with a piercing gaze!

Then He confronts them with their own Scripture in Psalm 118. Here their history is prewritten. These leaders were the builders and they are about to reject the very corner stone of God's building, God's redemptive plan. Jesus was so fully aware of His coming death, but also of His resurrection. He became the cornerstone of the church, fitted in to the building, bringing the two walls into alignment. Those leaders should have known! Their own Scripture condemned them. Peter quotes this very Scripture in Acts 4 to the leaders who were trying to shut him up.

*Acts 4:7-12 When they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, "By what power, or in what name, have you done this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, 9 if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, 10 let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by this name this man stands here before you in good health. 11 "He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. 12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."*

Later in Acts 7 Stephen boldly calls these leaders out just before they rush on him gnashing their teeth and stoning him to death:

*Acts 7:51-52 You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 Which one of the prophets did your fathers*

*not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become;*

### **The severe warning.**

Then Jesus gives them a severe warning of the consequences of rejecting Him as their Messiah.

*Luke 20:18 Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust.*

If you trip over this Stone you will be destroyed. The second picture is from Daniel 2 when the stone cut out without hands, Christ, will come and crush and pulverize the entire world of unbelief and rebellion, and the Stone will become a great mountain filling the whole earth.

Later Christ will assure them that even their city of Jerusalem would be taken from them (Luke 21:20). In AD 70 Rome demolished the city and temple and extensive destruction to all of Judea. The Roman historian Tacitus says 1,197,000 Jews were killed or sold as slaves. They paid dearly for casting the Son out of the vineyard and murdering Him by the hands of the Gentiles! Most of these leaders were not only crushed physically but are paying the price of their hatred of their Messiah.

Now, as you see in verse 19, these malicious leaders knew Jesus was talking straight to them! It won't be long, only a few days, when they will ignorantly fulfill their own Scriptures as murderers of their Messiah.

**SO WHAT?** What do we draw from this amazing parable?

God is patient with us. You would think the owner would have immediately come and crushed those vine-growers when the first servant came back empty-handed, but he didn't. The owner demonstrates God's patience with us, too. We don't always produce the fruit of the Spirit for His glory. Believers don't lose their salvation, but God looks for them to produce fruit, even much fruit (John 15:8). And God is also patient with lost people. 2 Peter 3:9 assures us, "He is not slack about His promise of judgment, it will come, but He is patient, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." But His patience has an end. You can't fight against God and win. You can try to shut out His Word from your heart, but you will be the loser.

God wants complete ownership of our lives. Our natural hearts would do the same thing these leaders did. We don't naturally want Christ to rule over us. We often live as if our lives were our own. Our hearts are deceitful and desperately wicked. As my favorite Puritan Thomas Watson says repeatedly in His works, "The natural human heart would not only unthrone God, but ungod God." Let us thank God for His patience and sovereign grace toward us. Thank Him for changing our hearts from rebellion to submission to His Son in faith.

How wonderful to once again see the beautiful sovereign control of Jesus Christ in this passage. He fully knows what the leaders are intending. In fact, they were predestined to murder Him, and He knows it. Our Lord is always in complete control. He is in control even today in all the unrest of our own nation. Never forget it. God is never taken by surprise. His redemptive plan was through this greatest of all crimes in world history when Jesus took our sins in His own body on the cross. That's what the early believers understood.

*Acts 4:27-29 For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, 28 to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. 29 And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your word with all confidence.*

May we too speak His Word with all confidence and all boldness, knowing the Word of the Lord never fails. "How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord, is found for your faith in His excellent Word!"