

A Warning  
Luke 20:9-19

Warnings come in all shapes and sizes from the obvious to the bizarre. Some are hysterical. Some make you wonder who wrote them and how they function in society.

Air conditioning window units are now required to display this warning: "Caution – avoid dropping air conditioner out of window."

The warning tag on your iron may read: "Warning – never iron clothes while wearing them."

Ours also says on the bottom "Do not immerse and household use only."

(You're going to go home and check aren't you?)

Halloween is coming up and just in case you were wondering a warning label on the Superman costume reads: "Warning – cape does not enable user to fly."

The label on Little Ones Baby Lotion reads: "Keep product away from children."

On the side of a bottle of sleeping pills and Nytol sleep aid – "Warning – may cause drowsiness."

Maybe you could add your own. Warning labels and signs are designed to protect us and keep us safe even if they are obvious or humorous.

Our passage today is a warning. It is a warning for those who would reject Christ. Just a few days earlier Jesus had been welcomed into the city of Jerusalem to the shouts and praise of hundreds of thousands of people who had arrived for the Passover celebration. He was lauded as the Messiah and worshipped as King. Their expectation was for Him to establish His royal throne and rid them of the oppressive Roman government. They were waiting for His revolution to begin and expected it during the Passover. While the crowds cheered His

arrival, Jesus gazed upon the city and wept for it and its people. He knew that in days they would reject Him as the Messiah at which time He would be crucified and He knew that in just a few short decades the city and the Temple would be laid waste as the Romans would come in and destroy both. Unlike the past when the city and Temple had been destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar later to be rebuilt by Nehemiah and Ezra, the Temple would not be rebuilt. Instead, today standing on the site where the court of the Gentiles would have stood stands the Dome of the Rock, a vivid reminder of the conquest by Muslims and erected in 691. According to Wikipedia it is considered Jerusalem's most recognizable landmark.

It stands not only as a place of worship for Muslims but it is also a clear reminder of Israel's rejection of God, a reminder that idolatry has replaced the true worship of the living God. It didn't happen at once.

Jesus wept over the dark spiritual condition of the nation and their rejection of Him as the true King. Over the course of the next several days prior to His betrayal and arrest, having cleansed the Temple, He would openly teach in the Temple courtyard.

When Jesus began His public ministry the religious leaders tried unsuccessfully to discredit Him and catch Him in some inconsistency. They watched His every move and questioned His every motive, His every action, and even His disciples. They were relentless in their attempt to prove He was not the Messiah and at every occasion they were unsuccessful in their endeavor, even going so far as to try and kill Him.

Last week we looked at one more attempt by the religious leaders to entrap Him with a question having to do with His authority after clearing out the Temple. They were literally asking just who He thought He was. Our passage today is a parable that He gave to answer their question and it comes with a warning for them and for us as well.

Turn to Luke 20:9-19 where we will see four important truths about God and the subsequent warning that comes from our understanding of Him. As we consider this parable let's understand what Jesus is referring to so that as we read it you will know to whom He is referring.

The owner is God.

The vineyard is Israel, the land and its people.

The tenants or farmers are the religious leaders who were supposed to be spiritual guides.

The servants are the prophets sent to reprimand Israel for its sin and to return them to God.

The son is referring to Jesus Christ.

The others spoken of in verse 16 are the Gentiles.

The goodness of God

The patience of God

The love of God

The justice of God

## I. THE GOODNESS OF GOD – v. 9

Jesus begins His parable with something that would be very familiar to His audience and bear in mind that while He is sharing it with all those who were listening to Him it was specifically intended for the religious leaders who came questioning His authority. "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time."

Vineyards were a common site around Israel. It was a common practice, especially if the landowner had a sizeable vineyard, to hire out the land to tenant farmers. And in this parable, it appears that there were a number of farmers who leased the property. The landowner and the tenant farmers would come to an agreement of terms that would include how much the landowner expected based on the yield. Keep in mind that he owned the land and the farmers were leasing it. The vineyard didn't belong to them; they just worked it and took home a portion of the yield. With that the owner headed out for a long journey and was away for a

considerable time.

Many consider this to be the intertestamental period from Malachi the last prophet to the coming of John the Baptist.

Let's take a little tour of the Old Testament. In these passages we will see the goodness of God to give and keep His promises.

II Corinthians 1:20 "All the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him amen, to the glory of God by us." meaning that all the promises of God will come to pass so that He might be given glory by us. These verses reflect the promise of land.

Genesis 12:1

Genesis 15:7

Genesis 22:15-17

Let me just pause there and say that by the end of Genesis in chapter 46 that promise seems to die. They leave the land and head to Egypt where they remain for 400 years. Many OT passages indicate the promise of God to Israel to be given land and even refer to it as a vineyard.

Exodus 3:7-10

Deuteronomy 19:1

Joshua 1:1-11

Psalms 80:8-11

Isaiah 5:1-4a, 7a

Jeremiah 2:21a

God's goodness is clearly seen in His choice of Israel and in the giving of a land to them in which to live and prosper. He asked only that they obey His commandments and they would multiply both as a people and their possessions.

Let's be clear about one thing and that is from the very beginning of creation seen in Genesis 1:1, God is not only the Creator of everything, He is also the owner of it all.

Psalms 24:1 "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it."

Everything belongs to Him and He chose to give a portion of land to Israel for them to be the tenants, the farmers, the stewards. That is the backdrop to the parable. “A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time.”

Now I want to make something else abundantly clear, because there are plenty of people out in the world who believe that God is an absent landlord. Many believe He got it going and then things got so out of control that He left the building so to speak only to let it self-destruct so He can start all over. That couldn't be further from the truth. God is present and God is active in the events of the world. Even before the beginning of time God had in plan a redemptive process that would encompass the events of history culminating at the cross when Christ would be the sacrifice of sin. Galatians 4:4 says that at the right time God stepped into time to redeem it. That speaks of the goodness of God.

And from the very first chapter when we read the account of God's creative acts we see His goodness. At the end of each day as He looked over what He had done He said that His work was good. And on the sixth day He look it all over and said it was very good.

His goodness is evident in James 1:17 where the author writes that “every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows.”

If on any day you think that God has dealt you a bad hand, you need to stop and count your blessings. If you think your health is rotten, thank Him for His goodness that it won't be eternal and that someday you will have a new and age defying body that won't get sick, require some surgery to look years younger, or succumb to death.

If you think you are poor, thank Him for His goodness that you will inherit all the splendor of heaven and enjoy streets of gold.

If you are persecuted for your faith, thank God for His goodness that He sees what is happening to you and will one day pour out His wrath.

When we look around at the turmoil around the globe, when we consider the moral decay of our own nation and consider that what seemed like an impossibility that may come to pass in our lifetime that here in America Christians will be persecuted, thank God that He is still in control and thank Him for His goodness.

We are most familiar with Lamentations 3:22-23 which reminds us that His compassions never fail because His faithfulness is great. Verse 24 continues by telling us that “the Lord is good to those whose hope is in Him, to the one who seeks Him.”

Let's never forget that God is good all the time. Let's never forget that all the time God is good. The psalmist bids us to “taste and see that the Lord is good.” (Psalm 34:8)

From verse 9 we see the goodness of God. It was the tenants who messed things up. Yet in spite of what happened in the vineyard, the owner showed remarkable patience.

## II. THE PATIENCE OF GOD – vs. 10-12

Anyone planting a vineyard knows that it won't produce in the first year. It will take several years of tending before a harvest of the fruit. When the harvest was ready, the owner sent a servant to collect the agreed on amount from his tenants. Notice please the progression of what happens. The first servant showed up to collect the rent and they beat him up and sent him away empty handed. A second servant was sent to collect the rent and they beat him up and mistreated him sending him away empty handed. A third servant was sent to collect the rent and they wounded him and threw him out of the vineyard. Their actions indicated that they no longer accepted the terms of the owner and were laying claim to the

land. They were rejecting his authority and ownership and denying him what rightfully belonged to him. By rejecting his servants who represented him, they were rejecting the owner. Each time their mistreatment of the servant was more aggressive, more blatant, more devious than the one before.

And that is exactly what mankind has done to God. All of us really belong to the Lord, yet by our sin we have rejected His ownership and through our sin we are declaring our independence from Him. We're saying we don't want to give Him what belongs to Him. We're saying we don't need God.

Here is the remarkable point of the parable and of the nature of God. God has every legal right to exercise justice and mete out judgment on us as wicked tenants, but here's the remarkable thing about God – God is patient.

II Peter 3:9

The owner in Jesus' parable gave the tenants multiple opportunities to keep their agreement. He sent servant after servant. We see that throughout the history of Israel. Noah preached repentance for over 100 years before the flood. Then there was Moses who not only led the Israelites out of Egypt but gave them the commandments of God to keep that they might prosper in the land, but they rebelled.

After conquering the land they rebelled and God sent judges to restore them to a right relationship with Him.

But they rebelled again and God would send a prophet or in some cases a King like Josiah to bring them back, to point them to a need for repentance and return to the Lord.

And then He sent John the Baptist.

And each time they beat them, mistreated them, stoned them, threw them out.

Jeremiah 7:21-28

God continues to show His patience not only with

the nation of Israel but with all mankind, not willing that any should perish, but all to come to repentance. His preachers and teachers are the servants called to represent God and bring to Him His harvest.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before radio or TV, people in America found entertainment by listening to orators. One of the most infamous orators was a gifted atheist by the name of Robert Ingersoll. He traveled around the country delivering eloquent speeches on the irrationality of believing in God. He was the Madalyn Murray O'Hare of his generation. One of his most dramatic methods was to stand on stage and shake his fist toward heaven and say, "If there is a God, I dare Him to strike me dead in 10 seconds!" Slowly he would count to 10. Women fainted. God-fearing people rushed for the exits, fully expecting God to send a fireball and consume Ingersoll. But nothing happened. It never did. After the countdown ended, he would challenge anyone in the audience to refute his claims. It's reported that in one small Midwestern town, an old, godly woman laughed out loud and said, "Mr. Ingersoll, do you think you can exhaust God's wonderful patience in just 10 seconds?" God is patient, but we also know from Scripture and from history that His patience will one day run out.

God is incredibly patient. How patient? II Peter 3:8 "But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day."

One author notes: "God does not view time as humans do. He stands above time, with the result that when time is seen in the light of eternity, an age appears no longer than one short day, and a day seems no shorter than a long age. Since time is purely relative with God, He waits patiently while human beings stew with impatience."

God is patient and wants us to obey His commands and to return to Him a spiritual harvest out of our

lives. Yet many are robbing God of what is due to Him. What will the owner do to those tenants for their blatant rejection?

This parable shows us not only the goodness and patience of God, but also the love of God.

### III. THE LOVE OF GOD – vs. 13-15

The landowner had every right to come and throw the rebellious tenants out of His vineyard and punish them for their disregard of the terms of their agreement. But he gave them one more opportunity. He had a son that he loved. He thought that if the son went, the one who was heir to the land, they would respect him. Instead the passage reveals what is truly in man's heart. They not only thought of a devious plot, they carried it out. They didn't just beat him up and toss him out on the curb, they murdered him. They believed that without an heir the land would belong to them.

This passage is incredibly indicting to the religious rulers listening. They completely understood what Jesus was saying. He just revealed to them their plot to put Him to death. But it is more than just revealing a murder plot, Jesus also showed God's great love.

John 3:16

Romans 5:8

Years ago in the early days of computers, the publishers of Time magazine were concerned about their declining circulation so they designed a campaign to send out thousands of letters making an emotional appeal to potential subscribers. In the past, such mailings were done manually at a great cost in human resources. IBM made a proposal to install a fully automated system that would write the letters, seal the envelopes, address them according to a selected database, stamp them and send them into the postal system without the letters ever being touched by a human hand. The huge computer was installed with much fanfare and anticipation.

However, there was a glitch resulting in a poor shepherd in Wyoming receiving 12, 634 letters appealing to him to subscribe to Time magazine. The surprised shepherd, who didn't normally get much mail, opened the mail bags and began reading the letters. After reading a few dozen, he sent in a subscription order with a note that said with that kind of persuasion it was hard to resist and he gave up.

God has sent us a love letter. It's the Bible. There are 66 books with 1,189 chapters and 31,103 verses all revealing God's great love for us.

In spite of how they treated his servants, the owner of the vineyard sent the son he loved.

In spite of how we have treated his servants, God still sent His beloved Son knowing that He would be put to death as a result. That is the greatest demonstration of His love.

I think that the passage is more than just an indictment on the religious leaders. I think that it is a warning to them, a warning that unless they repented they would receive God's justice.

God is good.

God is patient.

God is loving.

God is just.

### IV. THE JUSTICE OF GOD – vs. 16-19

What will the owner do to the wicked tenants? He will come and remove them.

I said earlier that God was the owner, the vineyard was Israel, the tenants were the religious leaders, the servants were the prophets, and the son was Jesus. The religious leaders would put Christ to death and because of Israel's rejection of the multiple warnings, what was given to them would be taken from them. Jesus said it would be given to another. The others spoken of are Gentiles. The Jewish system was being set aside because the

religious leaders rejected Christ and the people were following their leadership instead of God. We see in Acts that the gospel eventually is given to the Gentiles.

Romans 1:16 – the Gospel was to the Jew first and then to the Greek.

Acts 1:8 and Matthew 28:19-20 tell us that the Gospel is to go to the entire world.

But what I find incredible here is that the people reacted negatively. “May it never be.” “God forbid.” They didn’t make this statement because they found the story appalling with how the servants and the son were treated, but because they didn’t want what was theirs to be taken from them. To give it to the Gentiles was unspeakable and horrifying. Yet, their statement is a sign of their unrepentant spirit and ongoing rejection of not only historically rejecting the message of the prophets but now to reject God’s final messenger – His Son. They had willingly suppressed the truth.

God sent the Son with full authority and the Israelites rejected Him and the Lord then quoted from Psalm 118:22 “The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone.”

There is a story that has been passed around about Solomon’s Temple when it was being built. Every stone was cut out of a quarry miles away so that when it was assembled in Jerusalem there would be no sound of hammer or saw heard. All the stones were shipped to Jerusalem. That part is true. The story goes that as they prepared to assemble the stones they couldn’t find the cornerstone. The cornerstone is the stone on which the rest of the building is built. The angles of the walls and the positioning of the building itself come from that one stone. They asked the quarry master where it was. He said it had been the first to be sent. After a considerable search it was discovered that the stone had been rejected because of its odd shape. Thinking it was a mistake they had rolled the stone into the Kidron valley next to the city. With great

effort they brought the stone up and found it to be the missing piece.

Christ, the one who had been rejected, would be the cornerstone on which the church would be built. Salvation is through no other means than the person of Jesus. The one who was rejected has been exalted. Salvation can be built on nothing else than Christ. He is the cornerstone on which salvation rests and is shaped.

Jesus concludes with the only two options that are available.

To fall on the stone speaks of brokenness in repentance.

To have the stone fall on a person speaks of being broken by judgment.

Those are the only two options.

Anyone who repents will receive the support of Christ in salvation.

Anyone who rejects Christ will be rejected and doomed to destruction.

One author aptly sums it up this way: “Jesus is the means of repentance and judgment. To fall upon that stone is to have your life broken to pieces. This brokenness of life that comes by judging yourself and casting your life upon His mercy is the way of salvation and restoration. The one who falls upon Jesus the Cornerstone will indeed be broken, for it’s only in admitting our sin and our need that we can be saved. Rejecting God’s beloved Son by failing to cast your life upon Him has grave consequences. Those who aren’t broken before Him will one day be broken by Him.”

An angel in Revelation 16:5 declares that God is just in His judgments. Because He is holy He must punish sin. Jesus has been given authority. He is good, He is patient, He is loving, but He is also just. Even after all that, they still rejected Him. It was all part of God’s redemptive plan that we might accept the cornerstone that had been rejected. We are warned.

Romans 1:18-20; Jude 3; I Timothy 1:3-6