

LUKE 20:9-20

KILLING JESUS

Firstly, though, we need some background to this parable to help us to understand why Jesus is so bold to say the things that He says, and then I'll retell the parable expanding and explaining as I go along.

In our timeline of the church year next Sunday is Palm Sunday, but for our Gospel reading this comes after Palm Sunday. Jesus has already entered Jerusalem in that glorious parade of palm branches and loud Hosannas. Jesus has wept over Jerusalem and the people who reject Him. Jesus has entered the temple and driven out those who had turned His Father's House into a market place. Jesus has gone from being joyful, to being sad, to being angry. And now the people are also angry with Jesus, or at least one group is angry, and another group is listening to Him preach, hanging on His words.

For the next three days Jesus will be preaching in the temple. At the end of chapter nineteen we're told that "the chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy Him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on His words" (47-48). At the beginning of chapter twenty the chief priest, scribes and elders came up to Jesus to challenge Him – by what authority He drove people out of the temple, or that He even taught in the temple. In their discussion they refused to answer Jesus and Jesus refused to answer them, at least He wouldn't answer them directly. Instead, He told this parable of the wicked tenants.

A man planted a vineyard. The Man is God, and the vineyard is the people of God. God rented His vineyard out to tenants. They would be the religious leaders. The chief priest and scribes figured that out at the end, that the parable was about them. God went off for a long while – four thousand years for them. But over those four thousand years God sends servants to the tenants to get some of the fruit. That would be rent in one sense, but in this sense the rent is good works, the good things you do in response to the good things that God has let you have and use throughout your life.

The servants back then, long before Jesus' day, were the prophets. There were many prophets from Noah down to John the Baptist. However, Jesus lists just three. These three days of preaching the Gospel in the temple, three prophets, and the three days that are coming up very shortly, they're all pointing to something very important – a climax is coming in three Sundays, today, next week and the following. But first let's look at how these three prophets are treated.

They're beaten, beaten shamefully, wounded and cast out. A lot earlier in Jesus' ministry He said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' But I

say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire." (Matthew 5:21-22).

Jesus equated name calling and angry insults with murder. You don't have to kill someone in order to be guilty of murder in God's eyes, just being unjustly angry with someone is enough to be found guilty. We should fear and love God so that we don't hurt or harm our neighbours, but help and support them in every physical need.

None of these servants were killed in this parable, but they were murdered when they were beaten, treated shamefully and wounded. Yes, throughout the Old Testament many prophets were literally killed, murdered, but for the parable Jesus leaves the killing to a much greater prophet.

However, before we get to Him, we need to stop and realize what's going on up to this point. Jesus desires to save these wicked tenants, not to condemn them. Jesus is truly trying to turn these Pharisees around in their way of thinking. He shows them that their God is patient with them to the point of pain. Three prophets are rejected, murdered in the eyes of God, however, with God it's not three strikes and you're out.

God gets the brilliant idea of sending His Son. In doing this God is revealing Himself to these people, and to us. 'Maybe they'll respect My beloved Son.' You'd hope that they would, but God knows they won't. He opens Himself up to suffering, to losing His own Son because He greatly desires to bring these tenants, the pharisees, and us into His kingdom. God wants to call all people back to His kingdom. He's willing to do whatever it takes no matter how much pain and suffering it will cost Him.

And the pain and suffering do come. Just as Joseph's brothers, when they saw him off in a distance, had said, come let us kill our brother – these tenants say the same thing. The pharisees have said the same thing before our text, and they'll say it again at the end. With no beloved son to inherit the vineyard legally it would go to the tenants. It may not seem right to you, but that's just the way it was back then. So they killed the son. They killed Jesus, thinking they would inherit heaven by doing that. "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (NIV Mark 8:36).

In a world that's presently trying to kill off Jesus and the Christian faith Jesus' question to the pharisees is ever more important to us. What will the owner of the vineyard do to those who killed his son? What will God do to those who are trying to kill Jesus? Jesus says that the tenants would be destroyed and the vineyard, the people of God, would be given to others.

When you hear the parable, this answer seems like a good answer. The tenants beat the servants and killed the son. Why shouldn't they be gotten rid of, and better tenants be put in place? However, knowing Jesus was speaking against them the pharisees boldly exclaimed, "Surely not!" That is the arrogance of our world today. Those who oppose Jesus don't see themselves as doing any wrong, and they don't believe that they'll be removed some day.

However, Jesus now looks directly at those who are confronting Him and asks, "What then is this that is written: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.'?" Jesus is the stone that has been rejected by many, and He'll be the cornerstone of a new building, a new city of God. However, between now and then God patiently suffers the pain of dealing with us rebellious people so that He can make His promises of heaven known to us.

However, these chief priests make it clear that they're not interested. They return to their plots of how they can get their hands on Jesus and get rid of Him, and at the same time not incur the wrath of the people. They don't care about the wrath of God, but rather they feared the people. Christians today have much the same problem. We don't think too much about the wrath of God for our sinful behaviour, but we're worried about the unbelievers, worried about offending them, worried about being rejected by them.

In our efforts to reach out to unbelievers we often forget about Jesus and the blunt parables that He told. We can even respond like the pharisees. 'Surely not! Surely that person isn't going to hell!' We want everyone to have a nice afterlife, no matter what they believed in this life.

It didn't work out that well for the pharisees. They thought they were getting rid of Jesus. They were killing Him, murdering Him, but they weren't getting rid of Him. Here Jesus plainly tells them that He knows that they'll reject Him, but that their efforts would lead to His glorification to a place of honour. Three days after they would have Him killed by crucifixion He would rise to the right hand of God the Father.

From there Jesus still prays for us. He pleads with God our Father for our forgiveness when we hurt or harm our neighbours by doing or saying anything that may make their lives bitter, shorter or even ended. He weeps when we harbour anger or hatred in our hearts. He pleads that He longs to gather you together as God's children, just like a hen longs to gather her brood together under her wings. Through the Holy Spirit we're encouraged and enabled to help and support our neighbours, being merciful, kind and forgiving towards them. As our Father in heaven forgives us, for Jesus' sake, for our murderous attitudes and acts towards our neighbours, we in turn forgive others when they're mean or unkind towards us. And as odd as it may sound, we thank God that Jesus was killed for our sake, and in our place, so that we may have His gift of eternal life. Amen.