

THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

Luke 20:1-19

Key Verse: 20:9b

"A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time."

Today's passage tells us about the religious leaders of the time who asked about Jesus' authority (1-8), and the parable of the tenants (9-19). This passage teaches us that the authority of Jesus is not at all political, but spiritual authority which comes from God. The parable of the tenants teaches us how God wants to work with his people for world salvation.

First, by what authority? (1-8).

Even though he was bracing himself with the thought of death on the cross, Jesus was doing what he should do. He taught the word of God to the thirsty souls. He was planting the hope of the kingdom of God in their hearts. Even in the last days, he was carrying out his mission as usual. The impending ordeal he had to face on the cross and Satan's final assault might have made it very difficult for Jesus to keep on doing his mission--healing the sick and preaching the kingdom of God as usual, without being swayed by his life-consuming situation. Jesus' act of faith reminds us of Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."

At the time of the Passover, the religious leaders did not remember God's grace of deliverance and teach the meaning of God's grace of deliverance to his children. But, only being concerned about their political power, they came up to Jesus and asked, "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things. Who gave you this authority?" (1b,2) They were men of power and authority under King Herod's influence. Herod built Herod's temple. He embraced orthodox Jews and diaspora Jews and their priests with political power. In this way, King Herod made all his people his royal subjects. Despite this, they were daunted by the authority of Jesus. He was known as a country carpenter, but they felt that all the people hung on his words. They were even more threatened when they saw Jesus cleansing the temple, driving out the merchants, challenging the otherwise

undisputed authority of those in charge of the temple. They were even more annoyed when they saw that Jesus came to the temple regularly, and taught the word of God to the crowd of people who came for the Passover festival.

Their authority came from King Herod and tradition. But Jesus' authority came from God. The spiritual authority of Jesus came when he obeyed God absolutely. The authority of Jesus was not given by men, but by God. These religious leaders did not have to worry about Jesus' authority. But they said, "Who gave you this authority?" By this question, they wanted to make Jesus guilty of preaching the gospel of salvation without a license. In this way, they wanted to stop the work of God.

What did Jesus say to them? Jesus did not answer them. Instead, he asked them a question. Look at verses 3,4. "I will also ask you a question. Tell me, John's baptism--was it from heaven, or from men?" "John's baptism--was it from heaven or from men?" When they heard Jesus' question, they could not deny that John the Baptist preached with the authority and power of God. They also could not deny that they killed a righteous man, John. To Jesus' question they said, "We don't know." That was the best of many excuses they could make. If they had said, "From men," the people would have stoned them because they were all persuaded that John was a prophet. If they had said, "From God," Jesus would have rebuked them, "Why didn't you believe him?" The work of God was not stopped by their political power and authority. The mighty military power of the Roman Empire also could not stop the work of God.

Second, the parable of the tenants (9-19).

The parable of the tenants is a summary of God's history of his chosen people Israel (9). Through this parable, Jesus wanted them to see that they were chosen by God to take care of God's flock. The parable of the tenants reveals God's best love for mankind. Look at verse 9b. "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time." This short description condenses the first part of the book of Genesis. In this verse, "a man" refers to God, "some farmers," to his chosen people, and broadly speaking, to all mankind (Isa 5:1-7).

God made the vineyard and everything in it, and gave it to his people Israel to take care of it so that they might bear much fruit to God, and that their joy might be complete (Jn 15:11). In short, God gave his people Israel everything they

needed. Most of all, God chose them and gave them the privilege of taking care of the vineyard to produce good fruit. In addition, God gave them the task to preach the gospel of salvation to all peoples of all nations. It was the best blessing God could give them. Exodus 19:5b and 6a say, "You will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." This holy purpose applies to each of us. When we live in this world with the spiritual order established as God first, man second, the material world third--we are happy. But most people think that they will be happy if they can enjoy their sinful human freedom limitlessly. If they do so, they think they are wise. In reality, they become foolish (Ro 1:21). Many a person thinks that rich people are happy and that poor people are unhappy. That is not the case. This is nothing but fallen man's mentality. Fallen men think about worldly things which soon perish. They only think of human conditions or improvement of human conditions. Why then are there so many young people from rich families who are not happy? No one from a rich family says he is happy. On the other hand, those who are suffering because of their human conditions are not necessarily unhappy. Rather, they can be happy because they can grow as mature persons through many trials and hardships. The truly happy people are those who know God personally and who know how to thank God (1Th 5:16-18), and who give their hearts to God's mission given to each of them (Ro 1:5).

The tenants were blessed ones, but were corrupt. Look at verse 10a. "At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard." God did not abandon his people after giving them privileges and blessings. He watches over them to see if they are doing well. Let's see how the tenants acted when the owner sent some of his servants. Look at verse 10b. "But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed." Their act reveals that they were doing well but that they were not thankful to the owner at all. Out of their unthankfulness, they committed rebellion against the owner. They revealed the total depravity of fallen man. Fallen man always rebels against God at the time when he is most blessed.

When the tenants beat up the servant of the owner, it was an act of rebellion against the owner. But they did not care what would happen tomorrow. One student said, "I committed a great sin, but today I'm okay." The student was an exact description of the tenants. When they were unthankful, they became extremely evil. They had never expected that they would become such evil men. But they became such evil men because of the power of sin in them. They also

became as stupid as monkeys, to the point of assuming that they were the owners of the vineyard. There is a great liability that men without God are apt to become mental patients.

As the history of Israel proves, the Israelites were the chosen people of God. God chose Israel as his own people and trained them in Egypt for 430 years in the hope of raising them as a priestly nation--a nation of Bible teachers. After 430 years of training, God sent them to the promised land. As soon as they began to enjoy flowing milk and honey in the promised land, they abandoned God. And they began to like flowing milk and honey. When they abandoned God, something unexpected happened to them. Incessantly, they were surrounded by many enemies and lived in a succession of distress and trouble. Whenever they were in trouble, they cried out to God, and God never refused to stretch out his hands of deliverance to them. It is indeed the amazing grace of Jesus. Did they get better when God saved them? No, they were just the same. They were like a dog which returns to its vomit (2Pe 2:22). Fallen man does not thank God when he really has to thank God. Hosea laments over the fallen men of Israel: "I cared for you in the desert, in the land of burning heat. When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me" (Hos 13:5,6).

Our God is the God of long-suffering patience. Look at verse 11. "He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed." In this verse, "another servant" refers to the prophets. Why did they do so? James 1:15 explains this well. It says, "Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." The tenants were supposed to be the stewards of God. But they degenerated into gangsters. When they saw the first servant sent by the owner, they became outrageous. When the second messenger came, they treated him with contumely and cruelty and sent him back empty-handed. When the third servant came, they wounded him badly and sent him back to the owner.

What did the owner of the vineyard do with them? Look at verse 13. "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'" In this verse, we see God's long-suffering patience toward sinful mankind. He desired so much to have a right relationship with them that he was willing to do anything. Finally the owner decided to send his son. Read verse 13. "Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'"

How did the tenants respond? Look at verses 14,15. "But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him." In this way, they rejected God's love and purpose for them.

What did the owner of the vineyard do? Look at verse 16. "He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When the owner saw that the tenants did not keep their positions as the stewards of the vineyard, he took the vineyard away from them and gave it to others. When we read the parable of the tenants, we cannot but cry because of God's love and purpose for his people.

Third, Jesus is the capstone (17-19).

Our Jesus is the rejected stone and the capstone. What was the response of those who heard what Jesus said? Look at verse 16b. "They said, 'May this never be!'" Look at verse 17. "Jesus looked directly at them and asked, 'Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone"?' In this quotation we learn that Jesus is the rejected stone (Ps 118:22,23). It was a favorite quotation of the early church, used to describe the death and resurrection of Jesus (Ac 4:11; 1Pe 2:7). Jesus came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him (Jn 1:11); they killed him and threw him away like a rejected stone because Jesus was a stumbling block to their lives of sin, and because Jesus looked too poor and was not the kind of Messiah they had expected. They thought that if they killed Jesus, it could be the end of everything. But it was a mistake.

Jesus is the capstone. Jesus was abandoned by fallen men. But Jesus believed God would raise him from the dead and make him the capstone of the building and the sure foundation of all mankind. As Jesus believed, God made Jesus the capstone. In verse 18 Jesus said, "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." In this verse, "stone" refers to Jesus. No one can stand against Jesus.

Praise God for the truth that God is the owner of the vineyard and we are his tenants. We thank God for choosing us as his children in this corrupted generation.