

Parable of the tenants

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Preacher: Robin Silson

[0 : 00] Now, this week, from both passages, they touch on something that I think the majority of ministers will only discuss when it comes up in the book of the Bible.

It's not a go-to topic. Because it's quite clear what it's talking about. It's talking about judgment. It's specifically God's judgment of those who turn away from Jesus, reject his authority and reject him as king.

That's what this parable is about. Jesus says, I think it's in Luke's Gospel. He says, whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.

Whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me. Which means when you turn that around, whoever does not welcome Jesus, whoever shows him the cold shoulder, does not welcome him, shows a cold shoulder to the God who made them.

Which means that if in life you don't welcome God, if you don't welcome Jesus, if you don't welcome the life that he offers to the full, he won't offer the same back to you.

[1 : 24] Because it's what you wanted anyway. Separation from God is what you wanted. Having your own authority is what you wanted.

If you're not turning to him. And so, rejecting Jesus just leads to him rejecting you. And this is a hard thing for us to think about this morning.

It's never easy to think this through. But it is important that we do. It is important that we do. It is part of God's word for a reason. It is as a warning. Like we said last week, let the warning signals on your car, that tell you something is wrong, so have a problem or you'll break down.

And this, again, is a big warning signal. So that everyone would consider how they relate to the living God. How they relate to Jesus Christ.

Welcoming him or giving him a cold shoulder. Welcoming him or giving him a cold shoulder. And this is what we're going to be thinking about this morning. We're going to look at it three points.

[2 : 27] The greedy tenants, the furious owner, and the vindicated son. The greedy tenants, the furious owner, the vindicated son. Now, before we jump in, we just a brief reminder of where we're all at. This is the final sort of section we're doing in Matt's Gospel.

It focuses on the last week of Jesus' life. And he's in Jerusalem. And the passage we're in this morning, it follows on directly from the verses from last week.

The religious elite, the Pharisees, they're angry, remember. Verse 27. Jesus arrived in Jerusalem. He's walking. And the elders, the teachers of the law, the people from the temple of God, the elders, they come to him and they're said to him, By what authority are you doing these things?

You may remember, the reason they're angry is because he's just turned over the tables. And they say, Who do you think you are? Come in, doing all this. By what authority do you do this? Who does this bloke from Nazareth think he is upsetting the way we do things in Jerusalem?

They reject the offer of repentance. He holds it out to them. Will they acknowledge his authority? And they say, they turn it down. Because they love the power they exert over the people too much.

[3 : 39] Now, we're still in that same conversation. He's answered them once. They've rejected his offer to have a relationship with him. And Jesus won't answer them where he gets his authority from.

Instead, he tells them this parable. This parable, as we know, is a story with a deeper spiritual meaning. And it's about them. And it's about what's really going on.

So, what's quite unique about this parable is it's prophetic. Because it pronounces what's going to happen in the future, judgment on them. And it also is ultimately what he says is what's going to happen at the end of that very week.

It's his last week of his life. So, firstly, let's dive into it. The greedy tenants. And as you might have picked up, the reading that we had earlier, Isaiah 5, the imagery and the picture language used in this parable is directly lifted from Isaiah 5.

We read it earlier. The vineyard is the people of God that God grew, that he did everything for. In Isaiah 5, it said that God cleared it of stones.

[4 : 47] He planted it with the choicest of vines. But he did everything for his people. God went down to his vineyard. And what did he find? He didn't find good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit in Israel.

And you see how similar this parable we have in Mark's Gospel. It's almost the same language. Almost word for word. A man, verse 1, a man planted a vineyard.

He put a wall around it. He dug a pit for the winepress, built a watchtower. He's put everything in place for the vineyard for it to grow and bear fruit. Everything that is needed.

Mark's Gospel repeats the imagery. The vineyard is still the people of God, Israel. But there is a difference. End of verse 1. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place.

And what we see as this parable is laid out, is the parable becomes a history of God dealing with his people. It is a played history from a certain perspective.

[5 : 48] Verse 2. At harvest time, he, that's the man who represents God, who built this vineyard. He sent a servant to the tenants to collect from them some of the fruit of the vineyard.

That pattern's repeated. Verse 4. He sends another servant. Verse 5. Still another. He sent many others. More and more servants need to be sent. Why do they need to be sent? Because they don't return with good news.

They don't return with news that the vineyard is bearing fruit. The servants are seized. They're beaten.

Sent away empty-handed. Struck on the head. Treated with shame. And many of them killed. Who are these servants? In the history of Israel, it is God's people that he sends.

He sends the prophets to the people in the Old Testament. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, others. And what happened to those prophets? Exactly what happened when he's seeing them.

[6 : 49] They were ignored. They were beaten. And some of them killed. From a certain perspective, this is what happened in the history of Israel. And then we come to verse 6.

After all these prophets have gone, they've been ignored from all of God's people. Verse 6. He had one left to send. A son. Whom he loved. He sent them last of all, saying, They'll respect my son.

But the tenants told him. This is the heir. Come, let's go. Let's kill him and the inheritance will be ours. So they took him and killed him and threw him out of the vineyard. And the parable, he's talking about them.

The religious elite, the Pharisees, this conversation is still going on with Jesus. And this is the way Jesus responds. The Pharisees, those in charge of leading God's people. Those who are in charge of growing the people of God.

The vineyard, the vineyard, seeing fruit, are the final group of tenants. They should be making it grow. But they want the son's inheritance for themselves. So they take him, kill him and throw him out.

[7 : 58] The tenants kill the son. Why? We said because they want the inheritance for themselves. They want what rightfully belongs to the son. We just need to pause and answer them.

What is the son's inheritance? What do they want from him? On the night before Jesus dies, when he's praying to his father, this is one of the things he prays.

It's a big long prayer, John 17. There's a line in it and he prays this. He says, I pray for them. I'm not praying for the world, but for those you have given me.

He prays this to his father. For those you have given me. The son's inheritance, what Jesus will inherit us, it is the people of God.

God the father gifts, he gifts to Jesus the people of God. That is what Jesus receives as his inheritance. What he's looking forward to receiving is the people for himself.

[9 : 02] And it's that that the Pharisees and the temple people of the temple, more than anything else, is to have God's people for themselves. They're greedy to maintain the power and control over them, which they've had for so long.

Using God's law and rules as, not as a way to bless people, but as a way to maintain and exert authority and keep them under their foot as like a vice.

That is the reason they killed Jesus and will fulfil the prophecy contained within the parable. Because Jesus will take that power and control over them. They won't God's people for themselves.

And you see what he's saying in addition? He's saying, you're no different. You're no different from the wicked ancestors who killed God's prophets. You're no different. You're not in the line of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David and Isaiah and the prophets.

You're no different from the prophets that you'd like to think. You're no different to those in the history of Israel who you would condemn. You're no different. The living God still has a good idea.

[10 : 16] It's the church. He loves his people. He loves the church. It is very precious to him. The church, God's people, it is a gift from the father to the son.

We are you. Do you realise you are Jesus' inheritance? Jesus will inherit you as his gift.

The father gifts you to the son. You're the apple of Jesus' hand. You are the gift. And Jesus still sends people to tend to it.

He sent prophets in the Old Testament. He sends the son to bring that kingdom. He says pastors and ministers in one sense. And in another sense, every member of the church is sent to nurture, to tend to the vineyard, to tend to one another.

And one day the son, Jesus Christ, will come again to his vineyard to collect it as his inheritance. And he says, Jesus Christ is sent to the vineyard to the vineyard. Which means, this is what it means.

[11 : 23] It means this, that how someone treats the vineyard or Jesus' inheritance, the ones that are precious to him, is a direct reflection on how they will treat Jesus himself.

It's a direct reflection. Because the people, the prophets in the Old Testament were beaten and killed.

Jesus has killed himself. And now Jesus has sent his spirit into his people to minister to one another. When God's people are mistreated, it demonstrates that they will do exactly the same to Jesus' inheritance.

There are a few things to say. First thing, the first thing to note is that this did, as we noted, this has happened through the entirety of the Bible.

So at one level, when we see it, we shouldn't be surprised that greed for power and wanting to own the people of God, wanting to exert power over them still exists today. Because it always has.

[12 : 26] So on one level, we shouldn't be shocked when we see it. It is opposition and rejection of Jesus' authority, but it's always happened. And so it will continue to happen until he returns, that there will be people, unfortunately, who may infiltrate the church and try to have that power for themselves.

There will even be good, godly people who might try to do, who might mistakenly try to do that as well. But we have the offer of forgiveness when that happens.

The second thing I want to say is that it should be a warning, and especially to leadership. How you treat, how we treat what is precious to Jesus, make us.

Because how you treat what is precious to Jesus reflects how you treat him. If Jesus inherits what he loves, what he's given to him, what he looks forward to receiving is mistreated by leaders.

Those who do that are acting just like the leaders in Jesus' day, and follow that wrong line of leadership. It's a warning. It's like the alarm going off in your car to remind you to do something about it.

[13 : 40] So we've thought about the tenants and the leaders. What does Jesus say God will do about it? And this is where it gets difficult. The second thing we're going to look at is the livid owner.

The livid owner. The anger of the owner. The judgment of the owner, perhaps. Killing the son is the final straw. It's worth noting before we get there how patient God has been, the owner has been.

Surprisingly patient. You notice he didn't just send one servant, but when we read he sent another one and another and another. He's very patient. They kept coming and beating, and some of them killed, but he kept sending another servant.

We read many in verse 5. Each servant that gets sent in that moment, the people of God have an opportunity to do the right thing. Perhaps this time, God's people or the leaders will listen to my servant and turn from their wickedness and produce fruit.

Perhaps they'll live as my people, but every time it's one big massive disappointment. The son, last of all, surely they'll listen to him. Surely, as God's people, they'll lay on a red carpet. But they act just the same.

[14 : 51] And we get to that part in verse, just verse 8, just before verse 9. When we wonder, perhaps we're asking the same question. What will the owner do when he finds out what's happened to his son?

Verse 9. What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill the tenants and give the vineyard to others.

Does that seem harsh? Is that what you expect in the story? Is that what you would expect in a...

If you heard that on the news, that somebody's son had been killed? If you heard that story on the news, would you expect to hear that?

Or would you think that's harsh? Every person is given a lifetime to consider Jesus. Every day is a day that turning to him and acknowledging him as the authority and the saviour is on offer.

[15 : 54] Everyone can turn towards him for life and relationship or can turn away from him. In the parable, the rejection and murder of the son end in their destruction. When it comes to spiritual reality, spiritual life, turning away from Jesus, does mean that he turns away from you.

He is patient and whilst you're out of breath in your lungs, the opportunity never goes away to acknowledge him. Admitting that you've made a mess of things and that you've not acknowledged Jesus as you should.

You can do that today. We saw that the Pharisees had that... They had that decision to make, but they chose to turn away.

However, the warning is that if you decide during your life that you never want a relationship with Jesus, it means very simply that when Jesus returns, or when you breathe your last in eternity, you get what you want from him.

You receive an existence that is as far removed from life and relationship and love and the compassion of Jesus as you move it.

[17 : 07] Every good thing from God in this life points to what heaven would be like. Every good thing. Every good thing.

Heaven shows us that all the muck and the mess and the horror, the brutality, the war, all the destruction, the misery, the depression, all of that is gone in eternal life.

If you have a relationship with the son. But it means that the opposite is also true. It means that an existence apart from him is in one sense an intensification of all that we see that is connected to sin in this world.

It means that instead of love, there will be isolation and loneliness. Instead of love, just hatred and anger. Instead of joy, just endless sadness and depression.

That is the future of eternity without Jesus. Call it whatever you want. But that is what it will be like. You still might be saying at this point, Is that fair?

[18 : 19] Is it fair? I want to suggest to you why the rejection of the woman who is of infinite value, who created you, is fair.

But this is what happens. I want to consider this. If I kill a spider in my house, Annabelle will praise me for it.

Because spiders have little value and we don't like them. Yet, I have killed something. Okay? So, I killed something with no value and praised for it.

But if I increase the value of the thing that I do something towards, then there becomes automatically what happens to me changes. If I could say someone's dog, I'm not allowed to kill someone's dog.

It has a higher value. In fact, if I kicked someone else's dog, I would get into trouble. You see, you can't kick people's dogs. You see, I've not killed it. I've done, you know, I killed a spider.

[19 : 21] I don't kill the dog. I can't even kick a dog. I'm not sure I don't want to kick a dog. I'd get into trouble. Increase the value. Let's take someone's child. Now, I can't do any of those things, but I can't, now I'm going to change a letter of a thing.

I can't shout at someone else's child because they're of a higher value than a dog. I might, you might, if you really shouted at a child, somebody might even call the police on you or they might investigate, like, if he's like that, but someone else's could go, he's like his own case.

He'll get social services called out. You see what I'm saying is the value of the thing goes personal. The object goes up. The sinner that is acceptable against them is less.

Less is acceptable. Less is tolerated. The punishment increases. I've gone from killing a spider to shouting at a child. It's not accepted either. The first one is. It's more serious.

Now you extend that to the God who created and made you, who is of infinite value. Infinite. He's far more important. He's of infinite value.

[20 : 27] Whatever value you place on him, if you place that, if you can even put a number on how you place him, he's higher. You can't place the value of him. Infinite value. If you do anything remotely against him, it has an infinite consequence.

Infinite. So you reject him. If you reject him, if he's going to reject you, that's not just, he's going to reject you infinitely, which means that you have an infinite, eternal, eternal rejection is for infinite, is for the rest of you all the time.

You see how it works? When you realise that, you see actually that it is fair because Jesus and the living God are of infinite value. There's another warning line. Pay attention.

How do you treat Jesus? Do you welcome him or do you show you the cold shoulder? Do you welcome him or show you the cold shoulder? So we've looked at the greedy tenor.

We looked at the furious owner. Finally, the vindicated son. The vindicated son. And what we see is Jesus connects what he's been saying to verses from Psalm 118. We sum these verses this morning.

[21 : 35] We sum up Psalm 118. We just look with me what he says. He says it in verse 10. He says, Haven't you read this passage of scripture? The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.

The Lord has done this and it is marvellous in our eyes. To understand what's properly going on we must pause, at least for a moment, to take a deeper look at what Psalm 118 is really all about.

Psalm 118 is written about a king. We don't know which one. But a king of Israel who was victorious in bloody battle against the ox. It's written and we sung and we sung it this morning in praise and thanks to the Lord because of what the Lord has done through his king and through their king, through our king, we sing it now, achieving a great victory.

When the victory comes in this psalm, it is for this king that he's written about in the context, it is a victory that nobody expected. If you were to look earlier in that psalm, you read about that king, it said he's hard pressed.

He's surrounded by other nations and he knows that trusting in the size of his army is useless and he has to trust in the Lord. And yet victory happens because it's the Lord's plan.

[22 : 49] The verse is that Jesus repeats to them. Jesus repeats. In the psalm, it's after this victory of this king, the stone that the builders rejected, the king, basically, that no one believed in, is what it means there, has become the cornerstone.

This king has become the most important stone. He's become the most important stone in the building. Here translated as cornerstone, literally in Hebrew, that word for cornerstone is the head of the corner, which means, actually, the cornerstone of the Hebrew building or the head of the corner is not a stone in the foundations, as you might think.

It's not that everything is built on this important stone. The head of the corner is the stone that is lifted up in the building to the place of prominence when the building is finished that everyone would see.

That gave the building or the temple here the wow factor. That it is finished, the impressive stone. In the psalm, this is the moment when the king would have been given the place on the throne.

All of God's people are celebrating this great victory. He's sat on the throne. He's in the temple, the center of Jerusalem. Everyone can see the king of Israel. He's the most prominent place on his throne.

[24 : 07] And his victories have vindicated him. That's why this picture language is used. The king is like the cornerstone. He's the head of the corner, a place of prominence. Everyone can see this king.

You see what Jesus is saying when he quotes this time? He's saying, I'm the king taking the place of prominence in Israel. I'm the cornerstone. I'm the head of the corner of the temple, of God's house, of his temple, for everyone to see.

And he's saying, and yes, you are the Lord's house. And of course, Jesus' rejection at this point has not finished.

His victory has not yet been complete. But he will be lifted within the week to a place of prominence for all to see. He will become the head of the corner, the cornerstone, and it will be the Lord God's biggest victory through his king.

Jesus' coronation, his cornerstone, head of the corner moment, does not come on a throne in Jerusalem, but on a cross outside of the city walls. He's lifted high for all to see.

[25 : 14] He is most like the cornerstone, the head of the corner, when his place of prominence, where he's on display, is treated as a slave hanging on a cross of wood, where he does indeed have a crown put on his head.

It is his obedience that vindicates him. And we say, this is the Lord's plan. The Lord has done this and it is marvellous, in our eyes.

It is marvellous. The Lord's greatest victory in the line of the king becomes when he is lifted high on a cross of wood.

And so, as we draw in for conclusion, we've considered what it means for people who reject Jesus. Jesus says, whoever welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.

And so, whoever gives Jesus the cold shoulder, gives God who sent Jesus the cold shoulder as well. Jesus is the one who is of infinite value and to reject him, to give him the cold shoulder, comes with it, and comes with it, isolation, separation, misery, for eternity.

[26 : 31] But the good news, this is the good news, is that Jesus is the calmest one. He's the most prominent stone, lifted high for all to see, being crowned, hung on a cross, which means that if you have rejected him, whilst you still have breath in your lungs, he is giving, he gives all of us, everyone here, the chance of turning to him so that his death, his victory over death, can be yours as well.

On that cross, he experiences everything that those who turn away from him would experience for eternity.

What does he experience? He experiences separation and isolation from his father. He's completely alone, full of pain, misery, anxiety, depression, even the anger of God at sin, at everything wrong in our world.

He's poured out on his own son. He experiences it only. He does it so that we can have the future in our world.

To save us, that's why he did it. He wants everyone to be included in his inheritance. He wants to give, the father wants to gift you to his son, to delight in you, to make you precious, to know that the father and the living blood and the Holy Spirit think that you are precious in his son.

[27 : 59] So he wants the people the father gifts to his son. Almighty God, it is hard to think of these things and yet we know it is good and we know it is good that you judge all sin and yet judgment is a hard topic to address.

We thank you for the goodness of the gospel. We thank you that Jesus is the cornerstone. He is the one lifted high for all to see taking our sin, taking our, taking the, taking the anger of God, the one who is isolated, feels pain and misery, is anxious and depressed and experiences misery so that we won't, so that all the good things that you have promised will be received by us and that we get the gifts fit for your king and given to us your people.

I thank you that you delight in us, that we are precious to you. But as we hear this, we also mourn because we know what we know in our families and we know those people that we love, the people on our streets, street corners, we know that we are in our hearts Lord, aches our hearts, we pray that you say, we pray that while there is breath in their lungs that they will take us and that they will become precious in your soul.

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