

Text: Luke 20:9-19 (Pew Bible, pg.1041)

Title: “Love’s Last Appeal”

INTRODUCTION

Before I get started I understand that Bryan Howell, our student minister, in his message last week let the cat out of the bag that we were actually in New Mexico looking for a treasure hidden by eccentric millionaire Forrest Fenn. Fenn supposedly hid a treasure chest full of valuables in the mountains of New Mexico. Well I want to tell you that we did find a treasure chest in New Mexico, but when we got it home and opened it something tells me that we didn’t find the right one. Oh well, perhaps we’ll have better luck on the next trip.

What an amazing week this is ... Easter Week. Wednesday evening at 6:15 we’ll share together in a very special observance of the Lord’s Supper. Good Friday morning is our community Good Friday Service. Friday evening our choir and orchestra, along with our special friends Hue and Elizabeth Priday will present the Easter portions of Handel’s Messiah. Saturday is our children’s outreach Easter Egg Hunt in Capps Park. Then, of course, the climax of the Easter Celebration is Resurrection Sunday. Remember we’ll have our regular worship schedule, but no SMBS to insure that we have plenty of parking for our guests who will be joining us on that day.

Open your Bibles with me to Luke 20. Today I am concluding this brief series of messages on the life stories of Jesus. We’ve studied several of the parables that Jesus told during His ministry. The parable we have before us today is one that Jesus actually told during the week that began with His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. So during that week...

Luke 20:1 - One day as he was teaching the people in the temple courts and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, together with the elders, came up to him.

Notice that Jesus was “preaching the Gospel.” The parable that He is about to tell is in the context of the Gospel, the Good News of God’s salvation, being proclaimed.

Luke 20:2 – “Tell us by what authority you are doing these things,” they said. “Who gave you this authority?”

Jesus had just marched into the Temple and, seeing the horrible hypocrisy that was displayed there, began to overturn the tables of the money changers who were set up doing business in the place of worship. And the religious leaders wanted to know, “What gives You the right to come in and start overturning our business?” So the parable we’re about to hear was spoken against those who questioned Jesus’ authority.

But I want us to see beyond that to our own selfish tendency to reject the authority of God over our lives. We know that the religious leaders had hard hearts ... but so do we. We know that those religious leaders resisted the will of God and the Word of God ... but so do we. And we must know that it breaks the heart of God when He sends His Word to us time after time, only to have us carelessly ignore it, or worse, callously reject it. So Jesus tells this parable. Read Luke 20:9-19.

The Easter Story ... the account of the events in the week of Jesus' death and resurrection ... is in many ways a tragic and sad story. However, in other ways it is the greatest love story of all time ... the story of God's amazing love for us that would cause Him to send His dearly loved Son to die for our sins. This is a story of "Love's Last Appeal."

So here is a simple, understandable story, straight out of the agricultural and business world of Jesus' day. His listeners would have been familiar with an arrangement like this where a landowner plants a vineyard, goes off and leaves it to be run by tenant farmers.

1. THE DESIRE OF THE OWNER (Luke 20:9)

Luke 20:9b - "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time.

In NT times the hillsides of Palestine were covered with vineyards. If you go to some places in our country, like the Napa Valley of California, you see a similar setting. In Jesus' day the production of grapes was a mainstay of the economy. So here's a wealthy man who buys a piece of land to develop it for a vineyard. And when he finished that the story says that he went on a journey, leaving the vineyard to be tended by tenant farmers. These farmers didn't own the vineyard; they were responsible for running it successfully and producing a crop that would bring a profit to the owner.

And this is a picture of what God has done. He has done this in creation. He created the earth, and placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. They had all they would ever need for a fulfilling life as they lived under the provision, direction and authority of a loving Creator. He didn't create Adam and Eve as robots, but as human beings with a free will to choose to live under His authority or not. Well, as you know, Adam and Eve chose not to do that. Instead they rebelled against God in the Garden when they sinned.

And so God is sovereign in His ownership over us all. He is sovereign in His authority over us all. And His desire is for His will to be done. But also we see...

2. THE DENIAL OF THE OWNER (Luke 20:10-12)

Luke 20:10 - At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed.

So months pass and harvest time arrives. The landowner sends his servants to the caretakers to receive the profit from the vineyard. But in heartless brutality the caretakers beat the slave and send him away empty-handed. But it doesn't end there:

Luke 20:11-12 - He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out.

So a mutiny occurs and the attendants tried to seize control of that which belonged to the owner. Notice:

- **There is a pattern to this denial and rejection.**

One after another the messengers from the owner/master are rejected. And Jesus is speaking about the prophets who came and preached to Israel and to their neighbors ... prophets who, one after the other, were ignored and even persecuted. Listen to what God had to say through one of those rejected messengers by the name of Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 7:25-26 - From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets. But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers.'

You know, this is true in our lives. In those areas of our lives where we are rebellious, haven't we heard God's Word over and over, only to carelessly, even callously reject it? There is a pattern to it.

- **But there is also a progression to this denial.**

In Jesus' story, each time the denial by the servants is more calloused, more brutal, more violent, more blatant, more calculated. After a while it could have become just a big joke. Perhaps they laughed when the next messenger appeared at the entrance to the vineyard: "Alright, let's see what we can do to abuse this guy."

Note: One of the most dangerous things about rejecting the will of God and the Word of God is that it becomes easier every time you do it. And finally you get to a point where it doesn't bother you to tune out the voice of God in your life.

ILLUSTRATION - Psychologists and physiologists know about a condition known as "habituation" where people no longer respond to noises. They will create a certain sharp noise, and then measure its effects upon brain waves, eye movements and skin resistance to electricity. They will repeat a sharp noise every five seconds or so (BANG ON PULPIT). Now the first time that happens it shocks you (or wakes you up). But after that if I repeat that sound it doesn't create the same effect. You get used to it. And that's what happens to us when we repeatedly ignore the voice of God in our lives.

- **But amazingly there is patience with our denials.**

Why else would this master keep sending his servants? He wasn't stupid. He saw what happened. But he was patient with these rebellious tenants.

I think about how God never gave up on David. Here was a man that God chose as a shepherd boy and made him into a king. And David repeatedly failed and sinned against God, but God didn't give up on David.

I think about how God never gave up on Peter. Peter said, “Lord, others will desert you, but I never will.” But in the hour of trial, perhaps none of the disciples failed as miserably as Peter when three times he denied Jesus. But Jesus never quit on Peter. He was patient with him.

And I think about how patient God has been with me. I think about how as a teenager I sat in church week after week when my pastor preached the Gospel and pleaded with people to come to Christ. And week after week I smothered that pleading voice with excuses and rationalizations and everything else I could think of. And God would have been justified in giving up on me, but He didn't. He was patient.

And at the Cross of Jesus we see love's last appeal to us. The desire of the owner is met by the denial of the owner, which causes...

3. THE DECISION OF THE OWNER (Luke 20:13-18)

Luke 20:13 - “Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’

Now I want you to just think about the preciousness of the Son whom God sent. Just look at all this says about the Son...

- “My son...” - In God's sovereign timing the prophets came delivering the message and pointing the way to the coming Messiah. Then the day came when God sent His Son.

Hebrews 1:1-2 - In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

- “The son ... whom I love...” – Amazingly, these are the exact words that the Father spoke over His Son Jesus, first at Jesus' baptism, and then at the Transfiguration.

Matthew 3:17 - And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

Matthew 17:5 - While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

- “They will respect him...” – Above all Jesus is worthy of respect. When the Father revealed His Son He said, “Listen to Him!”

But the one the owner exalted is the one the tenants rejected. Unimaginably the hearts and minds of the farmers remain closed:

Luke 20:14 - “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.’

Luke 20:15a - So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

They think: “If we kill the son, then it’s all ours. We won’t have to endure another messenger. There, that should do it.” And the heartless rebels drag the son outside the vineyard and kill him.

Luke 20:15b - “What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?”

Luke 20:13a - “Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do?’

You see there is a dilemma here. On one hand there is his sense of justice. This is his land, his vineyard, his crop. He rightfully deserves to be paid. And when time after time his messengers are ignored and abused, the owner would be justified in taking extreme measures. On the other hand, the owner has a heart of patience, mercy and compassion toward these rebels.

And Jesus’ story ends with the landowner doing what everyone knew was just and right. Those rebellious tenants did not deserve a place in the vineyard.

Luke 20:16 - He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

What a tragic ending to this story. And we know that the events in the life of Jesus were even more tragic. The religious leaders in Jerusalem conspired to have Jesus arrested and brought to a sham trial before the High Priest. Then Jesus was carried before Pilate who caved in to the demands of the people and sentenced Him to execution by crucifixion on a Cross. Just like the story Jesus told, they forced Jesus to carry His cross outside the city walls of Jerusalem where, at a place called Calvary, they killed him by crucifixion on the Cross.

But if it goes for us like it went for the wicked tenants in the story, we should rightfully deserve to die for our sins ... for our part in the crucifixion of Jesus. And we hear the Father asking the question: “What shall I do? This is a dilemma.” How can the righteousness of God and the love of God be reconciled? How can God be completely loving and completely just at the same time? We see it in the cross.

ILLUSTRATION – Let me ask you to put your Bible down for a moment and let me ask you to help me illustrate this. We’re going to make the sign of the cross with our fingers. Everyone hold up your index finger. Let that vertical sign indicate the justice of God.

Romans 6:23a - For the wages of sin is death...

Next, to finish the sign of the cross, take your other index finger and made the horizontal arm of the cross. Let that signify the love and the grace of God.

Romans 6:23 - For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The justice of God and the love of God are satisfied in the Cross.

In Jesus' story, what those farmers did with the owner's son determined their destiny. And our eternal destiny is determined by what we do with God's Son, Jesus Christ. What the tenants didn't know was that disrespecting the son was the same as disrespecting the father. And what you do with Jesus is what you do with God. You cannot separate the two.

John 3:36 - Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

Well, Jesus concludes His life story, then...

Luke 20:17 - 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"?"

Now Jesus abruptly changes the images. He goes from the vineyard to the construction site. A foundation is being laid, and the most important stone is the capstone or the cornerstone.

ILLUSTRATION – The most important part of the house is not the roof. It's not the pretty front door, or the beautiful wood floors. The most important part of the house is the foundation. If you don't get that right, everything else eventually falls apart. And the most important part of your life is the foundation, and the only solid foundation is Jesus Christ. If you don't have that foundation in place nothing else matters, because nothing else will last. Everything depends on what you do with Jesus.

Some here today have heard the Gospel over and over, but you've never put your trust in Christ to save you. God has been patient and merciful to you right up to now. Today, stop rebelling and come to Christ.

Now most of us here are believers. What does this have to say to us? I want you to remember love's last appeal to you in the Cross of Christ. I want you to remember all that the God did for you in His Son Jesus Christ.