

# A Journey with Christ the Messiah

## The Parable of the Vine Growers

**Luke 20:9-16**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

This morning we are continuing a series that I have entitled *A Journey with Christ the Messiah*. In the last several weeks we have embarked on a journey through both the Old and the New Testaments with the purpose of discovering Christ the Messiah that is written there. We have looked at Old Testament prophecies and saw Jesus fulfilling all of the Messianic prophecies concerning Him. We have looked at His birth, His miracles, and His seven "I AM" proclamations. We have examined His death, burial, and resurrection from the dead and the significance of those events.

Of late we have been looking at Jesus' teachings through the parables that He taught during His ministry and trying to apply them to our lives. Our parable this morning was taught by Jesus in the temple when the chief priests and the scribes with the elders confronted Him. They wanted to know by whose authority was He doing His teachings. In response to their questioning Jesus told the people in the temple this parable of the Vine Growers. This parable is also referred to as the wicked tenants.

### **ILLUSTRATION:**

Most of us are pretty familiar with product warning labels. It seems like almost everything has a warning label on it today. I searched the internet for some actual warning labels that really make you question the intelligence of the American consumer:

Product: Reflective cardboard sun shade for car dashboards

Warning Label: Do not drive with sun shield in place.

Product: Zantac 75

Warning Label: Do not take if allergic to zantac.

Product: Demazin Infant Drops

Warning Label: This formula may cause drowsiness, if affected do not operate heavy machinery or drive a vehicle.

Product: Children's Dimetapp

Warning Label: If pregnant or breast-feeding, ask a health professional before use.

Product: Craftsman Push Mower

Warning Label: Do not attempt to remove blade while lawnmower is running or plugged into an outlet.

Product: Superman costume:

Warning Label: WARNING! This costume does not enable flight or super strength.

A warning label, however obvious the warning may be, is designed to keep us from harm. On the Sunday before the crucifixion, Jesus was welcomed by the cheers of the people and, over the next few days, He taught openly in the temple courts. But everywhere he turned, the Scribes and Pharisees were there to oppose him, challenge him, and plot against him. And so Jesus provides a sort of “**warning label**” in the form of a parable about a landowner and some tenant farmers. Here’s what he says:

## All Stand and Read Scripture

Luke 20:9-16 (NASB)

<sup>9</sup> And He began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey for a long time. <sup>10</sup> At the *harvest* time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, so that they would give him *some* of the produce of the vineyard; but the vine-growers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup> And he proceeded to send another slave; and they beat him also and treated him shamefully and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup> And he proceeded to send a third; and this one also they wounded and cast out. <sup>13</sup> The owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ <sup>14</sup> But when the vine-growers saw him, they reasoned with one another, saying, ‘This is the heir; let us kill him so that the inheritance will be ours.’ <sup>15</sup> So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup> He will come and destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others.” When they heard it, they said, “May it never be!”

As we prepare to continue this journey, let's bow in a word of prayer.

## Prayer

### **Let's continue the journey!**

When Jesus finished telling this parable, the Bible says,

Luke 20:19 (NASB)

<sup>19</sup> The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them.

For many years now these religious leaders had practiced a godless religion. Their rules and rituals became a substitute for truly knowing God. They weren’t using the product for its intended purpose. But Jesus came to earth to show us what God is really like. In this parable, He reveals four foundational aspects of the nature of God—a “**warning label**” for anyone who thinks they don’t need God in their life. First, Jesus reveals God’s property.

## **BODY:**

### **I. GOD'S PROPERTY**

At the beginning of the parable, Jesus said,

Luke 20:9 (NASB)

<sup>9</sup> And He began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and rented it out to vine-growers, and went on a journey for a long time.

That man, of course, is God. God is the owner. Only God doesn't just own a nice little vineyard in the countryside. He owns everything!

Psalm 50:10 (NASB)

<sup>10</sup> “For every beast of the forest is Mine,  
The cattle on a thousand hills.

And, as Dave Ramsey says—he owns the hills too! In fact, the Bible says,

Psalm 24:1 (NASB)

24 The earth is the LORD'S, and all it contains,  
The world, and those who dwell in it.

In other words, it's His world, we're just living in it! We don't own anything, we're just the tenants.

And do you know what else that means? It means, from the moment we set foot in this world, we owe a debt to God. We're living on his planet, we're breathing his air, and we're eating his food. The clothes on your back—made from his cotton. The gas in your car—derived from his fossil fuels. You don't even own you—God created us. God gives us our abilities. God gives us our resources. God gives us our skills and talents. God gives us opportunities. God gives us life and strength and energy. God gives us our homes and jobs and families. We owe him everything we have and everything we are—my life, my soul, my all belong to him.

The tenants in the parable, however, didn't see it that way. When it came time to pay back a portion of the harvest—to give God his due—they refused. They thought, This is our vineyard. We till the soil. We tend the vines. We harvest the grapes. We don't owe him anything. And, sadly, many people go through life with that very same attitude toward God. We'd rather not even think about God or what he's done for us. We just go our own way, putting confidence in our own abilities to work out our own destinies. We proudly say, “It's my life and I'm going to live it anyway I want.”

We forget that we are just tenants who live here in this world for a short time. God owns the vineyard, everything it contains, the world, and those who live in it. Thankfully, God doesn't want to give up on us. He gives us plenty of time and opportunity to change our hearts. That leads us to the second aspect of God's nature revealed in this parable—God's patience.

## II. GOD'S PATIENCE

As the story continues, Jesus says that the land-owner sent three servants to collect the portion of the produce that rightfully belonged to him, and each time the tenants “beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed”.

Now, it's important to remember that this parable was given specifically to the religious leaders of Israel. These messengers, therefore, represent the Old Testament prophets. In the Old Testament, God sent numerous prophets to Israel to warn them of the dangers of rejecting God authority over their lives. Most of the prophets were abused and hated

when they were alive. Elijah was threatened by a wicked queen, Jeremiah was thrown into a pit to die, and Amos was scorned and ridiculed. The messages of the prophets were never valued until years after they died. Someone once said, “Prophets, poets, and pigs have one thing in common—they aren’t truly appreciated until they’re dead.”

But despite their miserable treatment, God continued to send his prophets—warning Israel to repent and return to God. God demonstrated surprising patience with them. Hasn’t he done the same for you?

Those times you used his name only when you cursed? God could have struck you down. But he didn’t. He was patient.

Those thousand sunsets you never thanked him for? He could have made you color blind. But he didn’t. He was patient with you.

Those Sundays you strutted into church to show off your new dress or new shoes? It’s a wonder he didn’t strike you naked. But he didn’t. He was patient.

All those times you’ve spurned his affection, rejected his invitation, or accepted him with your lips but walked out that door and denied him by your lifestyle; surely God has ample reason to unleash his anger. But he doesn’t. Why? Because God is being patient with you.

**2 Peter 3:9 (NASB)**

**<sup>9</sup>The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.**

### **ILLUSTRATION:**

In the 1800's, before radio or television, people in America found entertainment by listening to speakers called orators. One of the most infamous was a gifted atheist by the name of Robert Ingersol. He traveled around the country delivering eloquent speeches on the irrationality of believing in God. One of his most dramatic ploys 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 ten seconds!” Then he slowly counted to ten. Women fainted, and God-fearing people rushed for the exits, fully expecting God to send a fireball and consume Robert Ingersol. Of course, nothing happened. After completing his count, Ingersol challenged anyone in the audience to refute his logic. It is reported, in one small Midwestern town, an old, godly woman laughed out loud and said, “Mr. Ingersol, do you think you can exhaust God’s wonderful patience in just ten seconds?”

God’s patience really is wonderful. It’s not going to run out in ten seconds or ten decades. In other words, God isn’t going to give up on you. He understands your faults and failings. He’s not only a God of second chances, but third chances and fourth chances too. He will give us every possible opportunity, to repent and return to him. Now, the third feature of God’s nature shows us just how far God is willing to go.

### **III. GOD'S PERSISTENCE.**

As the story continues, even though his servants had been rejected and abused, the owner of the vineyard takes an astonishing, extraordinary measure:

## Luke 20:13 (NASB)

<sup>13</sup> The owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.'

Despite all that would happen—knowing what happened to the many servants who came before Him—God, because of His great love, sent His cherished Son to the earth. Can you comprehend that? There is only one God and He has only one Son, and He loves us so much He sent that only Son to reconcile our debt with Him. So what did we do? Did we run out to meet God's Son and fall at His feet in surrender? No, like the vine-growers in the parable, mankind crucified the Son of God.

This parable not only highlights the truth about God's character; it reveals the truth about the utter wickedness of the human heart. The tenants of the vineyard did not kill the owner's son in the spontaneous heat of the moment; they made a calculated decision. They thought that by killing the son, they could claim ownership of the vineyard. That's what is so amazing about God's love. I am a sinner by nature and by choice, but God still loves me in spite of my sin. He loves you enough that He sent His Son to die for you. Even if you were the only sinner in the world, he still would have come—just for you. How can you resist that kind of loving persistence?

## **ILLUSTRATION:**

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 had been done manually, at a great cost in human resources, but IBM made a proposal to install a fully automated system that would print 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 system was installed with much fanfare and anticipation. However, as is often the case with computers, there was a glitch, and as a result a poor sheep-herder in Wyoming received 12,634 letters appealing to him to subscribe to Time magazine. The surprised shepherd, who didn't ordinarily get much mail, opened the mail bags and started reading the letters. After opening a few dozen, he sent in a subscription order with a note that said, "I surrender!" That kind of persistence is hard to resist.

So is the kind of persistence that drove Jesus to the cross. There he demonstrated just how far God would go to win your heart. Sadly, that's not the end of the story. The story doesn't end with repentance and rejoicing. Rather, it ends with God's punishment.

## **IV. GOD'S PUNISHMENT.**

At the end of the story, Jesus asks a question:

### Luke 20:15-16 NASB)

<sup>15</sup> So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What, then, will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup> He will come and destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others." When they heard it, they said, "May it never be!"

Now, this part of the parable, as with the rest of it, first applied to Israel. These religious leaders rejected Jesus and plotted his assassination. And because of their actions, God

ended his covenant with Israel and allowed the Roman army to march on Jerusalem. The once-holy temple, the city itself, and everyone inside was destroyed. But with Jesus' death, God began a new covenant open to anyone who would believe in him.

Thus, this prophetic parable was fulfilled.

Of course, the punishment of the Jews who rejected Jesus, points us toward an even more apocalyptic punishment looming on the horizon.

Earlier I mentioned

**2 Peter 3:9-10 (NASB)**

***9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.***

We cannot, however, overlook the verse that follows it:

***10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.***

God's love and patience are infinite, but so is God's holiness and justice. He simply cannot allow evil to continue forever. Who would want him to? And so there will be a day, sooner or later, when the King returns and destroys those who have rejected his Son. Peter uses cataclysmic terms when he says,

**2 Peter 3:7 (NASB)**

***7 But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.***

### **ILLUSTRATION:**

Paul Harvey's For What It's Worth Department once heard of a great escape! Gary Tindle was in a California courtroom charged with robbery. He asked and received from Judge Armando Rodriguez permission to go to the bathroom. While the bathroom door was guarded, Mr. Tindle climbed up onto the plumbing and opened a panel in the ceiling. Sure enough, it was a dropped ceiling with a space. So he climbed up into the crawlspace and headed south. He'd gone thirty-some feet when the ceiling panels broke from under him and dropped him to the floor....right back into Judge Rodriguez's courtroom!

It's difficult to escape man's judgment; it's impossible to escape God's.

Judgment Day is coming. There is no escaping it, no denying it. But thank God, that He's warned us ahead of time.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Warnings not to drive with a sunshade in place may seem obvious and unnecessary, but all of us need to seriously consider Jesus' warning. The earth and everything in it is God's property—including you and me. And God is patiently waiting for us to figure that out. He even sent his Son to show just how far he would go to win our hearts! But if we continue to reject his persistent love and his ownership over our lives, punishment is waiting.

Maybe you've been holding back from God. Maybe you haven't been ready to give him your life, your soul, your all. But when you consider what God has given you, his patience, and persistence—love so amazing, so divine demands nothing less. If you're ready to surrender your life to God today, come talk with me while we stand and sing.

If you do not know Christ as your Lord and Savior and you are in spiritual darkness, I invite you to come forward this morning and place your faith in Christ and be immersed in the waters of baptism and begin walking in the light and have an assurance of salvation.

**He is Lord!**