

## **God Responds To The Murder Of His Son**

### **Luke 20:9-18**

Take your Bible out and turn to Luke 20 as we continue our verse by verse study through Luke's detailed account of the work, ministry, and person of Jesus Christ. I'm preaching a message this morning I've entitled "God Responds To The Murder Of His Son."

Let me ask you: How would you respond? I spent some time this week reading several news articles and accounts of parents, and father's particularly, who took justice into their own hands in dealing with those who perpetrated acts of violence against their children. As my former pastor Bobby Atkins used to say, if you mess with one of my kids I guess I'll be forced to start a prison ministry – from the inside! There's nothing quite like the vengeance of a father against those who abuse or harm his child.

One such instance happened in 1984. A karate instructor in Baton Rouge, LA by the name of Jeff Doucet abducted an 11-year-old karate student and took him to California where he repeatedly abused him. The man was finally arrested and brought back to Louisiana to face trial. As he left the airport in handcuffs, in police escort, the boy's father, Gary Plauche, was waiting behind a bank of payphones where he emerged and gunned him down, killing him. He immediately dropped the gun. An officer subdued him and cried out to the dad, "Why Gary, why?" Gary Plauche responded, "If it was your son, you would have done the same thing." Chilling words. What moves a father to execute vengeance upon someone like that? I'll tell you what it is – it's love. It's love for his child, a deep love for his son.

That's a situation as a loving father and grandfather I hope and pray I'm never in – where someone perpetrates violence, abuse, or even murder of one of my children. Well here's the deal – God was in that situation. God, who by definition according to 1 John 4:8 is love. God, who has for all eternity had a relationship of love with his son Jesus. How would God respond to the murder of His son?

Well that brings us to our passage today in Luke 20. As we continue our series in Luke, let me remind you of where we are in our ongoing study. We took a break from this series last Sunday for Easter, but as we get right back into we are in the middle of the week that precedes Easter – Holy Week. Holy Week began on Sunday with the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem; he's riding on the back of a donkey and the crowds are proclaiming, "Hosanna to the son of David, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." That coronation parade concludes at the temple.

As Jesus goes into the temple on Sunday night he looks around and sees this religious flea market taking place with all the buyers and sellers and money-changers doing business, in the temple precincts. He heads back to Bethany Sunday night, gets up Monday morning and makes a beeline to the temple. He proceeds to take over and take charge, running out all of the merchants and money-changers, flipping over tables and crying out, *"My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you've made it a den of robbers."*

Now that Jesus has commandeered the temple precincts, we know from the gospel accounts that he spent the next couple of days teaching and preaching there. He's taken over that space and turned it into his personal classroom. Lord willing, for the next six weeks we will be examining all that Luke records Jesus taught in the temple on Tuesday and Wednesday of Holy Week found in chapters 20 and 21. We can't lose sight of the context of these teachings over the next several weeks – they all take place just days before Jesus will be murdered on a cross, and he begins that public teaching session with a parable, a parable that shows us how God responds to the murder of His son.

*<sup>9</sup>And he began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while.<sup>10</sup>When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup>And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup>And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. <sup>13</sup>Then 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 tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.' <sup>15</sup>And 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 those tenants and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!" <sup>17</sup>But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'? <sup>18</sup>Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."*

**Illustration:** For those of you in high school I'm sure you can relate to this, those of us who have been out of high school a while, reach back into the deep recesses of your mind and see if you can remember this phenomenon: When a teacher, or a coach, would give a lecture or rebuke to the whole class or the whole team, and he's speaking in generalizations, but you know, the point of this whole 15-minute speech is really directed at just one person, or maybe a couple of people. And instead of publically calling the individual offender out, he just tells the whole class how bad something is.

There were several times I can remember a teacher giving a long speech to the whole class, only to realize about halfway through, she's talking about me. She's telling the whole class about the ills and vice of a particular action or activity – she's publically chastising me in front of the whole class without naming me. It's really a masterful skill that some teachers have absolutely perfected.

That's essentially what Jesus is doing in this parable. He doesn't name the religious leaders outright. In fact, in verse 9 Luke says Jesus was telling this parable "to the people." He's speaking to the whole class. But in this parable, he's nailing the religious leaders of Israel in powerfully profound way. In fact if you look at the very next verse here in Luke 20, they realized that though Jesus was telling everyone this parable, he was speaking directly to them: *The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. Luke 20:19*

But as we consider this parable this morning, I don't want us to just look at it as Jesus telling this parable to the Jewish religious leaders of THAT day. I want us to look at it as a word for us on THIS day. Jesus is speaking to us today.

The New Testament records some 40 parables that Jesus taught during his earthly ministry. This particular parable is recorded in all three synoptic gospels. It is the most allegorical of all his parables. As an allegory, each of the elements and characters in his story symbolize someone or something. As we go through the message today we'll consider all the characters and who they stand for. Well there are three things I want us to consider from this parable this morning:

### **I. The EXPECTATION Of The Owner**

The main storyline would have made sense to all of the hearers to whom Jesus first spoke. They would have been used to absentee landlords — people who owned fields, who lived in other parts of the Mediterranean world, and who sent back servants or stewards to collect a portion of the yield of those fields from the tenant farmers who worked the land. Some of you may be familiar with this type of arrangement in your own family as my family was. My mom grew up in a sharecropper's home. My grandad didn't own that farm in South GA; he didn't own the two-room shack that my mom and her 10 siblings grew up in. But my granddad worked that farm, and raised his family as a tenant farmer, splitting the proceeds within the landowner.

And so that part of the story would have been very familiar to those who heard it. But the parable communicates to us something about God. And that's the next thing on your outline. We need to understand...

### **A. The PLANTING of the vineyard – God OWNS it!**

Jesus begins the parable with this foundational truth: *A man planted a vineyard...* The vineyard belongs to God. Why? Because God planted it. Matthew's account is even more detailed: *There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower. Matthew 21:33* In other words, he did all the work required to establish the vineyard, with all that is necessary for it to be fruitful and productive.

Jesus uses some very powerful imagery here that 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jews would have immediately picked up on that we 21<sup>st</sup> Century Gentiles don't get. The concept of a vineyard was very familiar to them. A grapevine was something like Israel's national emblem. If you see a bald eagle and think, 'Merica, or a Maple Leaf and think, Canada, eh – it's the same thing here. If you saw a grapevine you would think, Israel. All through the OT the imagery of a grapevine is used to represent Israel. Jer 2:21, Hosea 10:1, Ezek. 15:1-6, 19:10-4; Joel 1:7, Isa. 5:1-7. Notice just one, Psalm 80:8: *You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it. Psalm 80:8*

The owner represents God, and the vineyard represents God's covenant people. In fact in his commentary on Luke, Kent Hughes made this observation: *The vineyard/Israel connection was so much a part of their national consciousness that the very temple in which Jesus was standing sported a richly carved grapevine, seventy cubits high, sculpted around the door that led to the porch to the Holy Place. The branches, tendrils, and leaves were of finest gold. The bunches of grapes hanging upon the golden limbs were costly jewels.*

Can you see the imagery? As Jesus is telling this parable, in the temple, the backdrop to his story is a 100 foot tall golden grapevine with clusters of grapes hanging from it made of the finest jewels. And Jesus is reminding them of the fact that God planted the vineyard, he did all the work necessary to establish the vineyard as a productive endeavor. The vineyard belongs to God. He owns it! Not only the planting of the vineyard, but...

### **B. The PRODUCTION of the vineyard – the tenants HIJACK it!**

In the story, several years have passed, so plenty of time for the vines to start producing good grapes. The owner is ready to drink from the fruit of the vine!

So the arrangement is – God owns the vineyard and he has given the authority of the production of this vineyard over to these tenants. Who do the tenants represent? Who was responsible to care for the people of God so that they would bear the good fruit of obedience? The tenants are the spiritual leaders of Israel; the very priests, scribes and elders who were challenging the authority of Jesus in the temple the day before.

God had been away for a long time and he had entrusted the leaders of Israel to cultivate his people with good spiritual care – feeding them pruning them, and protecting them. They were supposed to love the people of God the way a winemaker loves his vineyard. This would be for their blessing and for God's glory.

And here's a point of **application** for us: God is eager for us to bear the fruit of obedience. And God is patient in that expectation. He waits, he has planted and established us; he has given us every provision necessary for godliness, he has given us leaders and his Word and he patiently awaits for our faithful production that will be both for our blessing and for his glory.

Yet the tenants in Jesus's parable abused their position. They hijacked the production of the vineyard as only a means for their personal gain and financial well-being. Not only that, when the owner sends his servants to collect proceeds from his investment, they beat and mistreat those servants. And in the language of the Bible, with each servant that is sent, the mistreatment he receives becomes more and more severe.

Now who do the servants represent in this allegory? They represent the prophets of God. Throughout Israel's history as they were misled by their spiritual leaders into idolatry and sin, God would send prophets to them. And the prophets had a tough job – their job was to go tell people they were in sin and needed to repent. Listen, that's not a fun job. Nobody's volunteering for that job – you had to be called by God. There's not a long line at the employment office of people pursuing that career choice. Why not? There's nothing enjoyable about confronting people in their sinfulness, particularly leaders who had the position and the power to kill you if they didn't like what you were saying.

And this is exactly what happened to many of the prophets of God that were called and sent by God to the people of Israel. And the original hearers of this parable would have picked up on the connection immediately.

Tradition tells us that they took the prophet Isaiah, and with a wooden saw they sawed him in half. They took Jeremiah and threw him into a pit and tradition says ultimately he was stoned. They rejected Ezekiel. Amos had to run for his life. Zechariah was also rejected and stoned. The prophet Micah was smashed in the face, 1 Kings 22:24 says, by the people who would not hear the message that he gave. And this is not the exception to how Israel treated the prophets, this is the norm.

Who treated them this way? The kings, priests and the leaders of the people, the religious people. Even the last prophet of the OT age, John the Baptist, was beheaded by Herod. And Jesus is reminding them, all through their history they have not only rejected the prophets God has sent to them, but have abused and killed them.

I couldn't help but think of the fact that this week, as we remembered the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the murder of Martin Luther King – April 4, 1968. How King was a modern day prophet who opposed sin and abuse and injustice; how he came with a firm commitment to non-violence, and how this message ruffled the feathers of those who were in positions of power and authority, and how he was gunned down in cold blood in Memphis, TN. This is how God's prophets are treated.

In fact in just a short time from this event here in the gospel of Luke, Luke will tell us in his follow-up book, the book of Acts, about a deacon named Stephen. Stephen is giving his defense before the Sanhedrin – the very religious council that condemned Jesus, notice what he says to them: *51"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 52Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered. Acts 7:51-52*

And what did Stephen get for his bold proclamation? Well, they took him out and stoned him to death for speaking the truth. And that leads to the next point to notice, not only the Expectation of the Owner, but number 2...

## **II. The EXECUTION Of The Son**

Twice in the gospel of Luke, we have seen Jesus identified as the unique, beloved son of God. The first time was in chapter 3 at his baptism when John Baptized him and a voice from heaven said, *"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."* The next time was in chapter 9 at his transfiguration and God's voice came from heaven identifying Jesus as the unique son of God. Now here in Luke 20, Jesus tells a parable, and notice how the Owner of the vineyard identifies his son in verse 13: *13Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.'*

As soon as we hear those words, as Christians, we know we are standing on the holy ground that is at the very heart of the universe. Do you see what Jesus is doing? He is telling the story about himself! If the parable is about the sending of a beloved son, the story must be about him. But the son was not only loved by the owner, he was sent on a mission by the owner. Still hopeful that his tenants would acknowledge his authority and accept their responsibility, the owner sends his only son.

As I read that this week, I couldn't help but think of times I've talked to a character on a TV show or movie, trying to protect them from an inevitable crisis. "Don't do it – don't open that door! Don't walk into that room. You're gonna regret that choice!" I almost get the same feeling when I read this parable. The owner has sent three servants, they all come back beaten, bloodied, and bruised. And when the owner of the vineyard says, "I will send my son, PERHAPS they'll respect him." I want to say, "Don't do it! Don't send your only, beloved son! They're going to murder him!"

And of course, that's exactly what they do. The owner has been absent so long, perhaps the tenants think that he himself is dead. So the heir of the vineyard comes, and notice their motivation for wanting to kill him: *<sup>14</sup>But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.'*

They've been given conditional authority over the vineyard, they want unconditional authority over the vineyard. They're the sharecroppers of the vineyard, they want to be the owners of the vineyard. That's the motivation for killing the son – to have ultimate authority over all the resources and property that have been supplied graciously by the landowner.

What this means, in practical, spiritual terms is this: "We don't want to answer to God, we only want to answer to ourselves. We don't want to live by the rules and expectations of our Creator, we want to live however we want to live. We don't want him to rule, we want to rule. And friends, is this not the recurring theme of humanity? I don't want any God in heaven telling me what I can or can't do; I'm the master of my own fate, the captain of my own ship, the ruler of my own destiny.

You see the response of the tenants is mirrored in our own lives. These individuals had privileges that they abused. They had a generosity that was showered upon them that they despised, and they had a responsibility entrusted to them that they rejected. Now think about that for a second: privileges abused, generosity despised, responsibility rejected.

Does that sound familiar at all? This deep-rooted desire for moral autonomy – I, and I alone, am the arbiter of what is right and wrong. We want to be God. This goes all the way back to the beginning of human failure and sin. What was the serpent’s temptation to Eve: *For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God.* Genesis 3:5

“Oh, you say I’ll be like God! Well, why didn’t you say that to begin with! Give me that forbidden fruit, I’m gonna eat it up!” And this desire to be morally autonomous, self-ruling and self-governing little gods has been a cancer on our race for all of human history, and it is what led to the eventual murder of God’s son. *‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’*

We want ownership, we want possession, we want ultimate authority. This song has been on repeat for millennia. And it’s what killed the son of God. And so listen to me – we all have blood on our hands. By our willful rejection of the authority of God in our lives, we’re all willing participants in the murder of God’s Son. Like the modern hymn says,

*Behold the man upon a cross  
My sin upon His shoulders  
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice  
Call out among the scoffers  
It was my sin that held Him there  
Until it was accomplished*

We are all culpable and willing participants in the murder of the gracious and generous landowner’s son. Why? Because we all want to claim ownership rights and ultimate authority over our lives.

So what’s a father to do? What would you do? That’s the question for this morning. How does a loving Father respond to the murder of His Son? Well that leads to the third and final point of my sermon this morning. Not only do we see the EXPECTATION of the owner, the EXECUTION of the son, but finally notice...

### **III. The EXPULSION Of The Tenants**

You know I hear people say things like, “Well, that’s the God of the Old Testament.” As if the God of the New Testament has changed or something. There’s this erroneous thought that the God of the Old Testament is harsh, judgmental, and mean. But when Jesus shows up, he kind of tones God down a bit, and now God is seen as grandfatherly, almost aloof and ignorant to what his people are doing on a day to day basis.



How else do you explain the fact that so called Christian people are partying it up on Friday night and praising it up on Sunday morning? How do you explain this duplicity? I don't know how else to explain it, except they have this view of God as someone who just is up in heaven saying, "Well, boys will be boys, girls will be girls, those silly little humans." Listen, our God is a consuming fire. He does not change. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament. And Jesus himself makes that abundantly clear. Notice how he concludes the parable: *What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup>He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.*"

This is the meek and mild Jesus talking here; these are red-letter words. And he makes it clear, in no uncertain terms what God will do to those who have spurned his grace, abused their privileges, despised his generosity and rejected their responsibility. *"He will come and DESTROY those tenants."* In Matthew's account he says, *"He will put those wretches to a miserable death."* Again, I ask the question – how would you respond to the murder of your beloved son?

Now in the historical application, this is exactly what happened. Some 37 years from this statement which Jesus made in the temple, the Romans came in and destroyed that temple; they did not leave one stone on top of another. This glorious temple which was to be the cultivating vineyard of the Jewish religious leaders; the centerpiece of their pride and arrogance would come crashing down to the ground.

But there's an even more significant present implication for them than the physical destruction of Israel. Jesus said he will *"give the vineyard to others."* God will give the spiritual leadership of his covenant people over to new tenants. The old tenants are destroyed, there is no longer a spiritual mantle of authority upon the Jewish religious hierarchy. That mantle of authority has been transferred to a new set of tenants who now have authority over God's people. And the people hearing the story understood full well the implications of what Jesus was saying. We know that from their response in verse 16: *When they heard this, they said, "Surely not!"*

The thought that God would transfer spiritual authority away from Israel's priesthood and scribal leaders over to others was completely outside of their framework of understanding. Now we know from the rest of the New Testament that the new spiritual leaders of God's covenant people would be the apostles. The church is built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles. Jesus then kind of mixes metaphors to explain how this happens.

He goes from the metaphor of the vineyard to the metaphor of a building. Let's read the last two verses again: *17But he looked directly at them and said, "What then is this that is written: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'? 18Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."*

Jesus is quoting to them from Psalm 118:22-23. Which just so happens to be the exact same Psalm they were singing about Jesus two days earlier on Sunday when they were shouting "Hosanna!"

The concept is simple: when builders would build a building, they needed a cornerstone. And a corner stone is the most important stone in the entire structure. It's key in the foundation. It's vital in the support of the walls and roof. But more than that, it sets the angles for the walls. It draws the lines by which the uniformity of the building maintains itself. And if the cornerstone is off, then down the way somewhere the whole building is off. And so a cornerstone was the most carefully selected of all stones that the building might be set as to its walls and its form in perfect order.

The stone that is rejected, God brings back and puts it in the place of the most significance; He makes it foundational to the whole building. Now who/what is the cornerstone that was originally rejected by men and is now put in the place of most significance? Well, just a few months from this point, Peter tells some of these very same religious leaders exactly who the cornerstone is. *11This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. 12And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* Acts 4:11-12

Jesus is the cornerstone that is rejected by many. Jesus is the cornerstone that is tripped over by many. Why do people trip over Jesus as the cornerstone? Because, they're fine with a Jesus who comes to them as an example of love; they can handle a Jesus who is just a moral teacher, a spiritual guru or guide. But they can't handle a Jesus who says he is Lord and God of all. So they trip over that Jesus. And what happens to those who stumble over the cornerstone? Jesus says they are broken to pieces.

What happens to those who reject the cornerstone? That cornerstone will fall on them and crush them. That's violent, destructive language coming from the lips of Jesus? And this language that Jesus uses of being destroyed, and broken to pieces, and crushed – that's all language that points to the reality of a literal place called hell.

And there are people today, perhaps even some in this very room, who would say, "I can't believe in a God who would send people to hell." And my answer to you would be, "What would you do if someone killed your one and only, unique and beloved son?" What would you do?

What would you do if you made the universe, and gave life to mankind, and they rebelled against you and spurned your goodness. And every time they rejected you, in love you sent them servants and prophets to correct them. And when you did that, they abused and mistreated and killed those prophets. And you waited a few thousand years, patiently, until finally you sent your beloved Son, and they murdered him. How would you respond to the violent murder of your son if you were God? God's answer is justice.

Let me say this plainly and clearly – this is who we are in the parable – we're the wicked tenants. As I said earlier, we've all got blood on our hands, we are all culpable and guilty in the murder of God's son. Christ died for our sins, 1 Corinthians 15. It was OUR sin that held him there.

But listen, here's the most amazing and remarkable thing about this story and its personal application to us.

First - All of us are guilty in the murder of God's son.

Second – We all deserve the righteous judgment of death and hell.

But here's how God responds to our murderous plot against his son – he offers us forgiveness. He says, "For the murder of my son, you deserve the death penalty, you deserve the judgment of death. But, I am willing to substitute my Son's death, by your hands, as the substitutionary punishment for your guilt in the murder of my Son."

This is why God is so unique and one-of-a-kind. No one has ever done this, ever! God is willing to take the death of his son by your hands to be the substitute judgment for the penalty and punishment you deserve for the death of his son by your hands.

Are you tracking with this? And it doesn't end there. The tenants in the parable want to kill the only beloved son so they can be the heirs of the great inheritance. God says, "You accept my kind offer, I'll adopt you into my family, I'll call you my son, and you'll be a co-heir with my son of my great inheritance, in a lavish kingdom for all of eternity."

Sometimes in the New Testament a word is used to describe the gospel, it's the word *skandelon*. This is scandalous love of God that he would offer such a gift of grace.

John put it this way in his gospel: *<sup>11</sup>He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. John 1:11-13*

Who wouldn't accept this gracious and kind offer? I'll tell you who – those who want to rule their lives; those who continue to abuse their privileges, who despise God's generosity, who reject responsibility. And so they trip and fall over the cornerstone of Christ, and they are broken to pieces.

So what are our take-away truths this morning? First to some of you I'd ask this question: have you acknowledged God's claim upon your life as the Creator and owner of all that you have? Have you accepted His Son? Is your life built upon the Rock of Ages?

Second, I'd ask others of you today, are you being a good steward of the vineyard where God has placed you? Do you constantly remember that you don't own anything, that He owns it all and He has the right to it all?

**Last Thought:** Jesus claims AUTHORITY in every area of our lives. Have we submitted to his RULE?