

# Parable of the Wicked Tenants

April 7, 2019

Our Savior's Way  
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM  
Pastor Mann

Desperate times call for desperate measures. I have a good friend that I have known for many years. She's a doctor. Last year her mother was diagnosed with stage IV cancer. There was not much the doctors could do. But my friend had heard about a new, alternative treatment in Mexico. So, last September, my friend, and her mother flew to Mexico. They stayed at this therapeutic health spa for a month—her mother receiving the alternative therapy. In the end, her mother died. But, what would you do? If the doctor told you, "*You have an incurable illness.*" Then you heard about this alternative treatment in Mexico or wherever—would you take it? Most of us would. Desperate times call for desperate measures. You see examples of it every day.

Jesus was facing a desperate time. Jesus had warned the chief priests and the teachers of the law over and over again. He had told them the truth, but they would not hear it. Now, it is Tuesday of Holy Week. On Friday he will be crucified. Still, they are not listening. In fact, just before our gospel reading, they rudely interrupt Jesus and demand, "***Who gave you this kind of authority?***" The entire situation is disintegrating. Jesus' enemies are going on the attack. So, it's time for Jesus to lay it on the line—put all his chips on the table. That's why Jesus tells them this parable.

What's the first thing you notice about the parable? The first thing I notice is that the violence is PROGRESSIVE. The first servant,

they beat him up and send him away. The second servant is humiliated and sent on his way. The third servant, they literally traumatize (this is the same word the New Testament uses when the seven sons of Sceva are beaten up by a demon—and run out of the house bloody and naked). So, sent away, beaten up, traumatized, then finally, the owner sends his son. What do they do to the son—they kill him! Desperate times.

Most of the time, when Jesus told a parable, his disciples asked him, ***“Explain what it means?”*** But this time no one has any trouble understanding the parable. In fact, they know exactly what Jesus is talking about. He is giving a history lesson. This is how Israel always treated God’s prophets. The Prophet Zechariah was stoned to death in front of the temple (2 Chronicles 4:21). The Prophet Uriah was murdered by King Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 29). The Prophet Jeremiah was beaten and thrown down a pit (Jeremiah 38). The Prophet Isaiah was executed by sawing him in two (tradition). Israel was always rejecting, beating up and traumatizing God’s servants. And still, God chose Israel to be his own people; God gave Israel his Law; God gave Israel a beautiful vineyard—a land ***“flowing with milk and honey”***. Why?—because God loved his people and he wanted Israel to be a light for the nations—pointing the way to salvation. If only Israel and its leaders had been faithful they would have harvested a bumper crop!

I think about our own country—this beautiful land that God gave us. Has there ever been a nation in history so blessed?—and spiritually blessed! We have God’s Word in our own language. We hold in our hands every version of the Bible and an endless supply of spiritual resources. We have more leisure time than any other nation in history to pursue spiritual things. We are blessed with the financial resources to support God’s work here and around the world. But with these great blessing comes responsibility—the responsibility of bearing fruit for the owner of the vineyard.

So, let’s apply this parable: You and I, all of us, are like tenants in the vineyard. In the vineyard, we’re either laboring for ourselves and our own advancement or we are living to bear fruit for our

Lord Jesus Christ. We have a choice in life--either we can work for ourselves or we can produce fruit for the owner of the vineyard—who is God. Clearly, the evil tenants in Jesus' parable wanted to keep everything they could for themselves. I knew this wonderful young woman. Her brother died and she was made trustee of her brother's estate. She was arrested for stealing money out of her nephew and niece's trust fund. After she got out of prison she couldn't get a job, so the church let her fill in as a secretary. She was arrested again for cashing the offering checks that came in through the mail. What is it that makes us think we have the right to take and keep as much as we can from the world? Here's the irony—all that stuff doesn't make us happy. The irony is that God has created us to find fulfillment and joy and pleasure in life when we bear fruit for Christ, not when we live for ourselves.

Several years ago, I asked a young father to be one of the leaders for a group of teenage boys in our confirmation program. He turned me down, at first. But then he admitted that Wednesday afternoons was his day to be out on the golf course. He felt so guilty about that, he agreed to take the class. He worked hard at it and over the next two years he developed a deep spiritual relationship with the 8 young men in his group—one of them his own son. On the day they were confirmed, I asked him, "*Was giving up golf on Wednesdays worth it?*" With tears in his eyes, this young father replied, "*My only regret is that I've waited so long to put others before myself.*" The joy he found in leading those young boys into a deeper relationship with Jesus far exceeded any pleasure he found on the golf course. God is the owner of the vineyard and he expects fruit from his people. When we do produce fruit we are blessed.

There is certainly a lesson in this parable: We need to be producing for God in his vineyard. As we look around at the world we live in, our families, our homes, our cars, this church—we need to remember—this "ain't" ours! It all belongs to God. He's the owner of the vineyard and we need to be producing fruit that would please him. That's the obvious lesson. But there is a second lesson here. In Romans 5:20, the Apostle Paul wrote: "***But where sin increased, God's grace and forgiveness multiplied even more.***"

Take a look at the parable. Beyond any reasonable expectation, God sent prophet after prophet to warn his people to turn from their sins. I hate to say it, but if God was any decent kind of businessman he would have thrown the tenants out of that vineyard a long time ago. The first time they refused to pay the rent they should have been evicted. But thank God that our God is not a hard-nosed businessman. He is far more patient than we could ever imagine. He sends messenger after messenger, warning us again and again. If you have been a Christian for any length of time, I know you can look back on your life and see God's extravagant patience and His abundant grace. And then God sent his Son. And we, the people of this word—tenants in God's vineyard—we killed God's son. The choir has a beautiful song. One line goes like this-- "*It was MY sins that held Him there.*" Our sins, yours and mine, nailed Jesus to the cross. We killed the Son of God. But even then, God does not throw us out of the vineyard. Instead, the owner of the vineyard disrupts the laws of the universe. He disrupts the laws of the universe and he raises his Son to life again. And to us, the evil tenants, he says—"*If you confess your sins and if you believe in my Son, you will have life forever.*" This is the amazing, extraordinary grace of God. And in the vineyard of the Lord GRACE ABOUND!!!

So, we are left with two questions: Will you put your faith in God's Son? And will you use the life he has given you to bear fruit for the owner of the vineyard?

I'd like to end with what's called "The Jesus Prayer." It goes like this: "*Lord Jesus Christ Son of God--Have mercy on me a sinner.*" As you say, "*Lord Jesus Christ Son of God,*" breathe in. As you say, "*Have mercy on me a sinner,*" breathe out. Now, say "The Jesus Prayer" silently to yourself five times.