

PERHAPS THEY WILL RESPECT HIM

Luke 20:1-19

Key Verse 20:13

¹³Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'

First, "John's baptism—was it from heaven or from men?" (1-8).

Look at verse 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. "Tell us by what authority you are doing these things," they said. "Who gave you this authority?" In their eyes, Jesus was not qualified to teach the Bible in the temple, because he neither was a Pharisee nor a teacher of the law; Jesus was not of a priestly family; he never attended JDS – Jerusalem Divinity School. They challenged him about his authority to conduct Bible study in the temple, to choose his disciples and train them. At this, Jesus replied, "I will also ask you a question. Tell me, ⁴John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men?" John the Baptist served great works of God; his ministry was very successful. By the way, did he have any certificate to give the baptism in the Jordan River? Did he have any degree or license to do so? No. Then, how could he do the work of God? Of course, it was because God called him to do so. His authority to do God's work came from God, not from men.

In his response, Jesus shows us that there are two kinds of authorities – one that comes from God, and the other that comes from men. The religious leaders had authority that came from men. The chief priests' authority was given by election. The teachers of the law acquired their authority by attending a law school, taking required classes, and passing the license exam. They were certified to teach others the Bible. But they didn't have authority that came from God. On the other hand, Jesus and John the Baptist did not have authority that came from men. They neither attended JDS, nor had any type of certificate or degree. But they had authority that came from God because God sent them to do his work. Luke 3:1-3 describes how John the Baptist could begin God's work. It reads: "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberias—when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea...the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." He was a mere man, but because of God's word, not because of any other reason, but because of God's word that came to him, he served God's work. Jesus proclaimed at the beginning of his ministry, quoting from the book of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Lk 4:18,19) God was the origin and cause of what Jesus was doing. Anyone can have authority that comes from men by their own struggles, by attending seminary school, by studying hard, by paying the tuition and passing the

exam. But no one can do the work of God in the true sense without receiving authority that comes from God. We do the work of God because God called us by giving us his words and sent us to do his work – we have this authority that came from God! As we do the work of God, we don't need to be so concerned about what people say, but we must obey God's will upon our lives and do what God wants us to do no matter what. When Jesus served God's work, he was challenged by the religious leaders about his authority, because he did not have any authority from men – no license or degree or certificate. But, he had no problem, because he had authority from God. Instead, Jesus challenged them back to think about the authority that came from God, saying, "John's baptism—was it from heaven, or from men?"

What was their response? Look at verses 5 through 7. They discussed among themselves and said, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us, because they are persuaded that John was a prophet." So they answered, "We don't know where it was from." What a convenient answer it was! They had no concern about the truth or about God, but only about protecting their own interest, and about justifying their rejection of God's servant. Simply, they did not live by the truth. They were liars.

Through this conversation, Jesus showed them that his authority came from God, and it was the time for them to believe him, accepting him as God's servant, God's messenger for them. But by saying, "We don't know where it was from," they rejected the truth deliberately that Jesus came from God. In this way, they rejected Jesus, pretending that they were rejecting him because they did not know whether he was from God or not. They thought that with this excuse, they would be able to justify their rejection of Jesus. But Jesus showed them that they were doing really a wicked thing by rejecting him through the parable of the tenants.

Second, "Perhaps they will respect him" (9-16). Look at verse 9. Jesus told them, "A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time." Here, a man refers to God, and a vineyard the nation Israel. In the Old Testament, God describes the nation Israel as his vineyard. Isaiah 5:1,2 reads: "I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit." In these verses, God shows us how much he has done for his vineyard – a vineyard on a fertile hillside, dug it up, cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines; built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. God did everything for the vineyard to produce good grapes, from the scratch to its completion. Then, he rented this vineyard to some farmers. Here, some farmers refer to religious leaders who were entrusted with God's flock in Israel. They were really privileged to be in charge of all God's flock in Israel. But the word, "rented" shows that the ownership still belonged to God, and the religious leaders were simply the tenants who should pay the rent.

At the harvest time, the owner sent his servant to collect some of the fruits as the rent. But the farmers refused to pay the rent; instead, they beat him and sent him away empty-handed. They were bad tenants. Had this happened in California, the owner would have reported to the police and the court and sent an eviction letter. But instead, the owner of the vineyard 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. They were really, really bad tenants. It seemed that the owner must have filed a law suit against them and kicked them out. But how did he respond? Look at verse 13. Let's read this verse together:

¹³Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'

Since the tenants rejected all his servants, the owner decided to send his son, whom he loved, saying, "Perhaps they will respect him." In view of how these tenants had treated his servants thus far, there was a great possibility that they would not treat his son in a good way; most likely, his son would be treated badly, or even there was a chance for him to be killed. Yet, he still decided to send his son, because there was a slight chance that they would respect him, because he was his son. He was willing to risk his son. This shows that the owner did not like to give up on the tenants; he was not pleased to cut off his relationship with them, even when they had done wicked things over and over. He wanted to maintain the relationship with them. Out of this desire for them, he tried all possible means, sending all kinds of servants to them, trying from the lowly servants, then, going up to more mature servants, and when all his attempts through his servants did not work, he even was willing to send his son, risking such great danger, all for the sake of keeping the relationship with them. For their sake, he went to the end, doing all he could, even willing to risk his own son. This is God's love for all sinners. This is how God has expressed his love for us thus far. We have rejected those whom He sent over and over again; yet, God never gave up on us; instead, He sent his servants continually, trying all his best shots, even including his son. Only thanks to God's unceasing efforts, even terrible sinners like us came to repent and turn to God; only thanks to God's unfailing love, even very stubborn people like us came to have a chance to open our hearts to him. Today we live, because of God's love. Love always hopes.

Also, the expression, "Perhaps they will respect him," shows that once they respected him by accepting him and paying the due rent promptly, he would not make an issue of the bad behavior they had shown thus far; he would simply forget about bad things they had done only if they respected his son. The owner of the vineyard is really generous, thoughtful, forgiving and patient. His efforts for the tenants went to the end, to the point of sending his son to them.

This is God's love for all fallen sinners. This parable is applicable also

for our own life. Fundamentally, as this parable of the tenants illustrates, we are not the owners of our life, but God is, and we are entrusted with his own property – we are his tenants with this one life which is beautiful and powerful – it comes with great potential to produce great fruit. We have full control over our life – we can decide whatever we want to do. But remember that there is a time when the owner wants to collect the rent from us. When the rent is due, we must be able to pay it. Then, what kind of the fruit should we pay? In Isaiah 5:7, we see the kind of fruit God expected from Israel. It reads: The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.” Justice and righteousness – God wanted to see a righteous people, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, but they produced only bad fruit. Galatians 5:22 and 23 talks about the kind of fruit God wants us to produce in our life. It reads: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” We have this obligation before God to bear good fruits in our life—the fruits of the Holy Spirit—that we become really wholesome, beautiful, humble, pure and sound children of God, not selfish, not sinful, not greedy, not arrogant, but sacrificial, holy and righteous. When God looks for righteousness from you, but only sees jealousy, rebellion and pride, how does he feel? When God looks for holiness from you, but only sees lust and sexual immorality, how does he feel? Have you paid your rent to God promptly? Or is it severely past due?

Also, as the owner entrusted his beautiful vineyard into the hands of the tenants, Jesus entrusted his precious sheep in our hands, telling us, “Feed my sheep.” And he expects to see beautiful children of God growing up under our care – a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. For this, we are called and assigned as shepherds and leaders over God’s flock. Let’s make all possible efforts to take care of God’s flock and establish them as beautiful children of God.

How did the tenants respond to the owner’s effort? Look at verses 14 and 15. Let’s read these verses together:

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.’

¹⁵ So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. “What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?”

They knew what they were doing – it was the first degree murder. The motive behind the scene was that they wanted to be the owners of the vineyard. This is the reason why people reject Jesus even today – they want to do whatever they want to do. They refuse to acknowledge God’s ownership upon their lives so as to live for themselves. In his effort to maintain right relationship with the tenants, the owner of the vineyard went to the end, but in wickedness the tenants also went to the end. In love for sinners, God goes to the end doing all he can do, but in wickedness, sinners also go to the end rejecting God’s love to the end. Jesus, the son is the last and greatest sign of

God's love for them, God's message that He wants to forgive them and restore the relationship with them. But if anyone rejects the Son, even the Son, he really has gone to the end, and there is nothing more left for him, except a dreadful judgment. On those who reject God's efforts and love for them to the end, God's wrath will be poured out.

Jesus said to them, "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others." Look at verse 16b. When the people heard this, they said, "May this never be!" They understood how wicked the tenants were, and they never wanted to be wicked like them. Who wants to be as wicked as these tenants? Surely, no one! But amazingly, despite their wish not to be wicked like this, they were doing exactly what the tenants in the parable did – they were even rejecting the Son.

Third, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone" (17-19). When they screamed, "May this never be!" it seemed that they were good people who would never do anything wicked. But Jesus was not impressed at all. Instead, he looked directly at them and said, "Then what is the meaning that which is written: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone?'" The religious leaders were builders trying to build the kingdom of God in Israel. In their eyes, Jesus did not look qualified to be a part of kingdom building. They already had the Bible, worship service, and offerings. They thought that they already had enough, and they did not need any support from Jesus. Simply, they didn't want him to do any work in the name of serving God. Jesus was the rejected stone by the builders. But God rejected their rejection. God took him and installed him as the capstone. The capstone is the uppermost stone in a building project, sometimes used to tie two intersecting walls together. As the top stone of a structure, the capstone was the crowning point. On it, they engrave the builder's name, and on the day when the capstone is going to be installed, they invite all related people, news reporters, and have a celebration. When the capstone is installed, it is proclaimed that all the building project is completed, and people shout for joy and celebrate. Jesus is the capstone – it means that Jesus is the completion of God's kingdom building project, and with Jesus, all God's redemption work is completed. When Jesus died on the cross, his last words were: "It is finished!" (Jn 19:30)

Today, no one, especially, God-believing people intends to be wicked like these tenants. They all say, "May this never be!" But Christians saying, "May this never be!" cannot impress God at all. Instead, in God's eyes, this is what people, even these God-believing people do all the time. How do people do such a wicked thing? By rejecting Jesus in their life-building project! They reject Jesus in regard to their career path; they reject Jesus in regard to their marriage matter; they may consider it a small matter, because they still go to church and say, "I love the Lord." But the problem is that the stone they reject is actually the capstone. Without him, their life building project cannot be completed. That's why despite all worldly successes and achievements, still so many people live in emptiness and

sense of meaninglessness. They become depressed, sorrowful, or fearful, unforgiving, and many of them become drug-addicted. Simply, they are like the building standing undone – as the rain comes, the building gets moldy and rusty – they become ugly. Jesus is the capstone. With him, your life is completed; with him, you know what to do with your life; with him, you have the meaning and purpose in your life. With him, you are happy and fulfilled. Jesus is the capstone in your life. Don't reject him in your life building project – he is the most essential part in your life. In every step of your life, go with him – don't you remember what the Bible says of Noah? "Noah walked with God." Don't you remember what Jesus said to his apostles during the last supper? He said to them, "Remain in me." Remain in Jesus in everything you do.

Look at verse 18. Let's read this verse together:

Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed.

Jesus is the capstone, the most important stone. Encountering him brings fundamental changes in people's lives. Based on how people respond to him, the end results are different – two different results: Either you fall on that stone, or that stone falls on you; either you will be broken to pieces, or you will be crushed. Before Jesus came, the Jews thought that they were good people, loving God and serving Him. They had zeal for God that they'd rather choose to die than denying Him. They never had any intention to be wicked like the tenants – "May this never be!" But when Jesus came to them, they were found as wicked as the tenants in the parable, rejecting the Son. At this, everything they had built up – their image, fame, honor and respect – crumbled down. At his coming to them, they were found not as a holy people but as a wicked people; they were found not as servants of God but as enemies of God. Their eyes were opened to see who they were, how they had lived and what they had done – nothing good at all. At this, those who open their hearts and accept the truth (those who fall on that stone) come to have true repentance – wailing and wailing; they are broken down – all their self-confidence is gone, all their own false images are gone, all their pride as God-believing people is gone, all their worldly hopes and desires are gone – they are broken to pieces. Then, they have a chance to start all over again in Jesus – this time, as real children of God. They start a new life in Jesus. Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces. Here, "everyone" refers to "everyone." What about "those God-believing Jews?" Yes, they are included. What about those God-believing "Christians?" Yes, they are included. What about those unbelieving people? Yes, they are included. Once they are broken to pieces, then, God rebuilds them in Jesus Christ as new people.

But like the religious leaders in the passage, some people are not willing to accept the truth. As Jesus comes to them and the truth is revealed of who they are, how they have lived, and what they have done, they reject the truth, not willing to admit their wrongdoings, their own wickedness and evil;

instead, they want to keep their own image, which is a false image and enjoy people's honor and respect as God-believing people; they refuse to break down; they refuse to be broken to pieces in Jesus. Then, what will happen to them? The capstone will fall on them either in this life or at his second coming, and they will be crushed – real judgment.

According to how they respond to Jesus, the capstone, the end result is totally different. Some people are broken to pieces and become new people, starting a new life in Jesus, because they accept the truth. Being broken to pieces, losing all the things they have valued so far such as their own image and their own righteousness is painful; but they are really blessed, no longer being deceived by their own false images or their own righteousness, but truly knowing God's grace and loving Him. But others reject the truth, insisting their own false images and their own righteousness; they will be crushed – other Bible versions translate it as “being ground to powder” – they will have no future in God at all. Now today, how do you respond?

God does not give up on people; despite their rejection, he keeps sending his servants, and even his Son, saying, “Perhaps they will respect him.” Today, don't you want to accept his love for you? Today, respect the Son by acknowledging God's ownership upon your life, by turning to God and living for him. God's love for you goes to the end.

One Word: Perhaps They Will Respect Him