

Lent 5
March 21, 2010

Don't Fight Your Landlord

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Luke 20:9-19

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In the Gospel lesson today, we heard another parable from Jesus. What I didn't tell you when we read that lesson is WHEN Jesus spoke this parable, or why. Jesus told the parable on Tuesday of Holy Week. On Thursday of that week he would be betrayed and on Friday he would die on the cross.

He spent much of that day in the temple courts, teaching the people. The chief priests and teachers of the law felt threatened by this. They wanted to discredit Jesus, and so they called into question his authority. "Who are you to teach the people in this way? Who are you to claim this message is from God?"

Jesus answered them with this parable. He taught them exactly what authority he has, and what happens when you don't submit to his authority. I titled today's sermon, "Don't fight with your landlord!" If you are a renter, you obviously do not own the property you live in. You better not begin to treat that property as your own possession, or fight with your landlord, or you will be evicted. This parable, then, is a stern warning to all who consider themselves to be the owner of their lives, possessions, time and abilities. But you are NOT the owner. God is. The Lord is your landlord... don't fight him!

The parable begins: "**A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time.**" That one sentence is the whole introduction to this parable, but let's not gloss over it. The point here is vitally important. The owner or landlord in this parable 1) owns the land and 2) He planted the vineyard. There is no question of ownership here, is there? It belongs to him. He then allowed sharecroppers to come in and rent the land. They would tend it and they would give a portion of the harvest to the owner. A very common situation back then, and one we still understand today.

The owner of the vineyard represents God the Father. The renters or sharecroppers were God's people... to whom God had entrusted valuable things. Particularly, Jesus has his sights set on the Jewish religious leaders. In a narrow sense, the vineyard represents Israel. The religious leaders were overseeing God's people. They were entrusted with their care. They treated as their own what belonged to God.

Let's just briefly apply the introduction to this parable to our own lives. Make no mistake: All we have belongs to God. Our very life belongs to God... and everything else does too. Our possessions belong to God. Our family belongs to God. Our abilities belong to God. Our time belongs to God. He is the owner. We are renters. We answer to him about how we use absolutely everything in our life that falls under our responsibility. Trouble starts when we begin thinking we are the owners instead of the renters.

The parable continues: "**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. 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.”

The behavior of the renters is unbelievable. The landlord owns the land. He planted the vineyard. There's no questions of ownership. But when he send a servant to collect the fruits of his vineyard, they act like it belongs to them. They beat the first servant and send him away. They beat the second servant and send him away with nothing. A third servant is sent, and they hurt him too and throw him out.

The Jewish religious leaders refused to acknowledge God as the owner. They wanted to be the owner. They wanted to call the shots. They came to hate God, the owner. They fought their landlord.

The servants that God had sent to Israel were the prophets in the Old Testament. And the way Jesus described how the servants were treated in the parable should have rung a bell with those Jewish leaders because that was precisely how Israel had treated God's prophets for hundreds of years. They could think back to how Israel had put to death all of the Lord's prophets except Elijah when Ahab and Jezebel were on the throne. They stoned Zechariah to death. They actually killed Isaiah by cutting him in half. The number of prophets killed in the Old Testament by God's own people is staggering. The fruit that they were supposed to be bringing to the Lord was just not coming. God sent them so many prophets to demand fruits in keeping with repentance for their sins, but Israel refused.

God has sent his servants to us as well to call us to repentance. In pride have we not claimed ownership of that which belongs to God? Consider these sinful attitudes which may be lurking in your heart:

- “My possessions are MY possessions... I'll use them how I want for whatever I want.” No, they're Gods... and he comes and asks you: “Give me the fruits. Give me what I deserve.” But we refuse.
- “My time is MY time... I'll spend my time as I see fit.” No, the time we have each day belongs to God and is a gift from him. He comes and asks, “Show me how you have used the time I gave you. Show me the fruits and give me what I deserve.” And we refuse.
- “My abilities are MY abilities... I'll use them as I see fit. No! The abilities you have were given to you by God. You are a renter, using them for at time. He comes and asks, “Show me how you have used the abilities I gave you. Show me the fruits. How have you honored my name and been a blessing to my people?” And we stubbornly do not listen.

How do we treat God's servants who bring his word of rebuke and correction? “Don't shoot the messenger!” surely applies here. Whether it's a pastor or a teacher or a parent or a fellow believer who brings God's Word of correction, how do we treat the servants of God? Kids, do you sometimes get mad at your parents when they discipline you when you do wrong? If someone lovingly points out your selfishness or wastefulness, or lovelessness... do we see them as messengers from our landlord? Or do we see them as trespassers telling us what to do with our property?

The parable continues: **“Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’ ‘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.’ So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.” The tenants of the vineyard did not even respect the owner’s son. They killed him, figuring they would then be the owners of the vineyard.

Jesus was of course shining a bright light on the sin of the religious leaders. They were literally two days away from arresting Jesus and killing them. It was a final call to repentance for them. But they were set in their sin. They were intent on killing him. They had no need for Jesus. They were sufficiently holy without him. They felt that without Jesus, they would be in charge of their own eternal life, and they would be in charge of people that really belonged to God.

The parable concluded: **“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”**

Were they so naïve and foolish as to think they would get away with this crime? Did they really think the owner would just go away if they killed his son? No, there would be a day of reckoning. They would pay for their crimes. They would be killed by the owner.

The call to repentance could not have been more clear for the religious leaders. Jesus knew their hearts and their intent to kill him. He pointed out their sin. And they refused to repent.

The call to repentance could not be more clear for us either. The day of Judgment is coming. It is the day of reckoning. Those who reject God’s servants and God’s Son and try to take ownership of that which belongs to God will be evicted. Evicted from heaven and apart from God and his blessings.

Now is the time to confess our disobedience. Take an honest look in your life. Where in your life do you refuse to yield to God and his will? Is it your finances? Are you bringing fruits to God or hoarding them to yourself? Is it your time? Are you using it for God and his people, or for yourself? Is it abilities Are you using them for God and his glory or yourself and your glory? The Landlord is coming. Are you fighting him?

This message today perhaps has been kind of a downer so far, hasn’t it? Let’s not end that way. Jesus warning is stern. We have taken it to heart. Is there any comfort for us renters when we have acted as “owner wanna bes”?

Yes there is. Judgment day hasn’t come yet... neither are you dead yet. Well that’s good news, right? It is. Because it means our God is very patient with us. In the parable he sent three different servants... and then his own son! Incredible patience. And our God is the same with us. He calls us over and over again to yield to him and bring him the fruits of all he’s entrusted to us. Our Landlord doesn’t want to evict us. He wants us to join him at the eternal heavenly banquet.

And so we bring our disobedience to him right now and acknowledge our guilt. “Lord, you are our Landlord and we are just renters. We have sinned against you. We have tried to take control of that which belongs to you. Have mercy on us. Forgive us.”

And our God answers us and assures us: “Your sin and guilt are removed. The Son who was rejected has become the capstone. He is the one who accomplishes and completes God’s rescue plan. His perfect life is just what we need for life with God in heaven. His death on the cross is just what we need to remove the guilt of our sin. With Jesus, under the cross, we are forgiven and restored.

We are again renters in good standing. As such, let us now work hard to use all that God has entrusted to us... but which ultimately belongs to him... to bring honor and glory to his name. Your time, abilities, possessions... finances, daily schedule, and your whole being... use them for him. Bring him the glorious fruits.

Fight our Landlord? May it never be. We know now his incredible patience and love. Let us then serve our Landlord and yield our lives to him. In so doing we will thank him for his endless blessings. Amen.