Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Murder of God's Son: A Prophetic Parable, Part 1
Scripture: Luke 20:9-18
Code: 42-245

We have the joy of returning to our study of the gospel of Luke, this great inspired history of the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. If you will, open your Bible to the 20th chapter of Luke, we come to verse 9 and a prophetic parable, a prophetic parable concerning the murder of God's Son.

If you have been with us in recent days in our study of the gospel of Luke, you're very well aware of the fact that we have now entered into the last week of our Lord's life before His death. As we come to this section, it is Wednesday, Wednesday of Passion Week. Friday He will be crucified. Sunday He will rise again. This is Wednesday.

Our Lord spent Wednesday in the temple area teaching kingdom truth and preaching the gospel, so we are told in 20:1. The day before, which was Tuesday, He cleansed the temple. It tells us in 19:45, He "entered the temple, began to cast out those who were selling, saying to them, 'It is written, "And My house shall be a house of prayer," but you have made it a robbers' den,' " or a robbers' cave.

He had come into the city in His triumphal entry on Monday. He went to the temple at the end of Monday, took a look at what was going on, came back Tuesday morning, cleansed the temple, threw out the businesses that were illegitimately operating there, that were desecrating and blaspheming the name of God and the house of God. Having cleansed it, He then commanded it, using it as a place for His own teaching and preaching. He also healed people who were lame and blind, as well as teaching kingdom truth, and preaching the gospel.

His act, however, of throwing out the desecraters of the temple, calling a halt to the business which was operated in the temple under the auspices of the chief priests and the high priests, was a final straw that broke the camel's back, if you will. It was the final assault on the Jewish leadership, the Jewish religious establishment. They wanted Him dead, they had wanted Him dead for a very, very long time. Increasingly, they were more vitriolic and more anxious to end His life and this pushed them right over the edge.

Jesus knew it would. He did it because it was right. He knew it would precipitate His death on Friday, and that was by divine designs since He was to die on Friday, because that was the day that Passover lambs were slain, and He was dying as the one true Passover sacrifice for sin. But that's still two days away. It is now Wednesday, and in one final display of compassion, and sympathy, and kindness, and goodness, and grace, our Lord spends the day, and even the next day, Thursday,

teaching and preaching the gospel, bringing the message of salvation, and forgiveness, and eternal life to the people.

They are listening. They are listening eagerly. They are still riding the emotional high of His triumphal entry on Monday. They are still hoping that He will be their promised King and Messiah, that He will bring fulfillment to all that was promised to Abraham, and to David, and through the prophets throughout the Old Testament. They are still hoping He will be the long-awaited deliverer, who will crush their enemies and lead Israel to final glorious kingdom preeminence.

And so they are listening. They are listening with deep attention. And the leaders are listening, too. They don't miss a thing He says. They are in and around every crowd to whom He speaks. They want Him dead and they're looking for the steps to lead to that, though it's not easy. Chapter 19 ends with these words, "He was teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes and the leading men among the people were trying to destroy Him, couldn't find anything that they might do, for all the people were hanging upon His words."

They were afraid, as we learned last time, to take a position against Him because He was so popular, and yet they were desperate to have Him dead because He threatened their theology, their religion, and their financial empire.

So, while Jesus is speaking to the people, He is speaking to the people in the parable before us about the leaders. This parable that we come to in verse 9 is one of three parables directed at the leaders. Matthew gives all three of them, Luke only gives one.

During the day, Wednesday, from the very early morning throughout the day, Jesus was moving through the temple, teaching. It may well have been that He repeated with slight variations this parable several times. Matthew's account of the parable is substantially exactly the same with a few variables. Mark's account of the parable is substantially the same with a few variables. And it is very likely that as He moved in the mass of people, He retold and reintroduced these themes. But there's no essential difference in this parable. As I said, in Matthew's gospel you have two other parables. This is the middle of the three. Luke only gives us this one.

Let me tell you the story that Jesus told, the prophetic parable that begins in verse 9. "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. And at the *harvest* time he sent a slave to the vine-growers, in order that they might give him *some* of the produce of the vineyard; but the vine-growers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. And he proceeded to send another slave; and they beat him also and treated him shamefully sent him away empty-handed. And he proceeded to send a third; and this one they also wounded and cast out.

"'And the owner of the vineyard said, "What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him." But when the vine-growers saw him, they reasoned with one another, saying, "This is the heir; let us kill him and the inheritance may be ours." And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What therefore will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others.'" That's the story.

Now as we look at this story and the subsequent statements of our Lord that follow it, we're going to be introduced to the coming death of Christ and its implications. This, then, is a very important parable because it looks forward to this event about to happen. It is also exceedingly important because it looks backward through all of Israel's history. It is a sweeping and comprehensive story told in very simple language, a stunning story, a story loaded with meaning, a bizarre and shocking story as you could tell.

Now as we unfold this story, I'm going to have you look at four features. One, the illustration, the story itself. Two, the explanation. And then next week we'll look at the extension and the application. But to begin with, the illustration and the explanation.

Verse 9, "And He began to tell the people this parable." He is speaking to this massive crowd that has been surrounding Him since He entered the city a couple of days earlier. This great crowd is now in the temple area. He is speaking to them, and mingled amidst them, of course, are the leaders. The story is told to the people and in the hearing of the leaders. Most importantly, it is a story about the leaders.

Simple to understand. "A man planted a vineyard." A very common occurrence in Israel. In fact, from an agrarian viewpoint, or an agricultural viewpoint, Israel is divided into two kinds of land, hillsides and flat land. Flat land is where you plant the grain. Hillsides is where you plant the vineyards. They terraced the vineyards, removed the stones, created little walls that allowed them to terrace, and then filled those terraced hillsides with vineyards. Very, very common.

In Matthew's account of the story - which may be the fuller account of the story, or it may be the same story with a little different detail Jesus told in another place during the days that He was teaching in the temple - Matthew shows us a little bit about the completeness of this effort by the man who planted the vineyard. He talks about putting a hedge around it, putting a winepress in it, building a tower, so that someone could sit and observe so that it wouldn't be attacked or assaulted by animals or enemies.

So it was a thorough job of planting a vineyard. Very, very familiar stuff to them, very common. All the hillsides of Israel - and there are many - were covered with such vineyards. "And rented it out to vine-growers." Commonly done, as well. This would be an absentee landlord. This is an owner who is not

there, who doesn't live there. He owns the land, but he's not present. These are tenant farmers. I guess we could call them that. That's what we would call them in our country, or contract farmers who come, don't own any land, but have certain farming skills and rent the land from an absentee land owner with a view to producing a crop and paying the owner of the land a certain percentage contracted and agreed upon. They are contract workers, then, given the benefit of working the land.

They have the best of everything, really. They have freedom to work the land the way they want. They can be as creative as they want. They don't have somebody looking over their shoulder. This is a wonderful opportunity. This is a great privilege as well as a great responsibility. They can work hard and they can produce the crop, and they will pay the owner what they contracted to pay him, everything else they get to keep.

So without having to purchase the land, they can get the best of it, and they can work hard and do very well in making a living. The owner, it says, if you go back to verse 9, "went on a journey for a long time." A long time. All journeys took a long time in those days. This would be a long, long time, an extended time away. In fact, such a long time away that he doesn't even come back between the time he contracts with these people to plant and the time of harvest. And so it is a long time.

Everybody would understand that kind of situation. There were people who owned land in Israel who didn't live in Israel, Jews who had moved to some other place. And so that's the common scenario.

Then harvest season comes, verse 10, "At the *harvest* time - " at the appropriate time, " - he sent a slave to the vine-growers." *Doulos,* he comes as an authorized representative of the land owner, and he comes for an obvious purpose in order that they might give him some of the produce of the vineyard. This would have been agreed upon in a contract. They would have agreed to it. The owner would have agreed to it.

This is just time for the owner to come and get his share of the crop so that he can have what is due to him. His share is now due. Nothing unusual about this. Very normal procedure. By the way, this kind of farming goes on today. It goes on today all over the world as it has for centuries, for millennia in the world, tenant farming, very, very common.

What is not common is the response of the tenant farmers. Back to verse 10. "But the vine-growers beat him - " that is the slave who had come " - and sent him away empty-handed." Now that is the shock in the story. And many of our stories that the Lord tells, familiar to us in the Bible, have this moment of outrage, this moment of shock, this moment of shameful, unacceptable, if not criminal, conduct. The listeners would see this as ungrateful, wicked, and criminal, illegal.

Not to pay him was illegal. To beat the servant and send him back with nothing was outright criminal. The word "beat" is a strong word, can literally mean "a full body pummeling," real abuse. Sent him

back with nothing. Verse 11, the land owner's response. "He proceeded to send another slave; and they beat him also and treated him shamefully - " The Greek verb from which we get the English word "traumatize" " - and sent him away empty-handed. He proceeded to send a third, and this one also they wounded and cast out."

In Matthew's record, he has even more servants being sent and some of them killed, and some of them stoned. These tenant farmers have conducted themselves in an absolutely outrageous fashion. They had been given privilege. They had been given opportunity to do very well. They had been given liberty and freedom. They had made pledges and promises and contracts. They manifest what is selfish, resentful, rebellious, criminal conduct, even to the extent of murder. They are vicious, disrespectful criminals.

Amazingly, this owner in the story, who has already demonstrated amazing patience, he would have had every right after they beat up the first slave and sent him back to show up, call in the appropriate authorities, and bring justice and retribution. He didn't. He sent a second slave. That is merciful. That is being kind and patient. They did the same thing to the second slave. He sends a third one. They do the same to him. This owner is extremely patient, giving them opportunity after opportunity after opportunity to do what is right, what they said they would do, what they agreed to.

And so he asks the question in verse 13. "And the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do?' " That seems a silly question, doesn't it? By now, everybody would have expected vengeance, vengeance after number one servant, vengeance after certainly number two, and number three. Why are you even asking this question? Why is there even such a soliloquy here? What is there to question? What shall I do? That ought to be obvious. The people would have taken the side of the offended owner. They would have in their minds said, "There is only one thing to do. Come and take vengeance, take reprisals, an eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, a life for a life."

But, the owner is very patient again and decides that he will try one more time. End of verse 13, "I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him." In Matthew's account of the parable, Matthew says, "Last of all, I will send my son." Finally, last of all, I will send my only beloved son, perhaps they will respect him.

That phrase is simply a way to say "this would be what I should expect to happen." They would show him respect, *entrep,* literally to be shamed into respect. After all the shameful things they've done, up to this point, surely one could expect some kind of righteous, civil treatment of my own beloved son. Maybe they had a low view of people who were slaves. Maybe they saw slaves the way a lot of people in the secular and Gentile world saw slaves, as animals. So the owner expresses a reasonable thought that they will show respect to a son, if not a slave.

But look what happens in verse 14. “When the vine-growers saw him - ” before he could say anything, apparently, nothing is stated as coming from his lips at all. They saw him. They knew who he was. “They reasoned with one another,” *dialogizomai,* they dialogued, they went in to a discussion, and this is what they came up with, “This is the heir, let us kill him that the inheritance may be ours.” Thoughtful planning. Full knowledge of who he is. The renters premeditate his murder so they can control and possess everything. They don’t want him encroaching. They don’t want him taking anything that they now believe is theirs. And the way to get that is to kill him.

Somebody listening to the story might imagine that maybe they thought the father was dead, that’s why the heir came because he hadn’t said anything. Maybe they assumed when he showed up that the king, that the heir, that the owner, rather, had passed on the property to his son, and all they would have to do then is kill the son, and it would belong to them.

According to the Talmud, if three years went by and no one laid claim to land, it reverted to those who were working the land. So if they got rid of the son, assuming that the son had come because the father may have been dead, it would belong to them. They wanted the inheritance to be theirs completely. They didn’t want the son exercising any control, having any authority, or exacting anything from them.

They immediately did what they planned, verse 15, “Threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.” Shocking story, like so many of our Lord’s parables, stunning response, shocking, designed to generate outrage, designed to make the audience feel outraged against those tenant farmers. This is unacceptable to law-abiding, religious people. This is unacceptable to people who feel that they are good people, that they worship God, that they try to do what is right. This is outrageous. This is pagan-like conduct. And so they fully identify sympathetically with the owner, and they are in outrage against the tenant farmers.

Verse 15, the end of the verse, “What, therefore, will the owner of the vineyard do to them?” Jesus poses the question that sucks them in. What will the owner of the vineyard do to them? The owner is not dead. The owner is alive. What will he do? He asks his listeners to complete the parable, to complete the parable.

You will notice in verse 16 that it says, “He will come and destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others.” And it appears as though Jesus answered the question, didn’t give them an opportunity to answer. But, if you look at Matthew’s account, and as I tell you so often, I think that the full account of these stories is in the composite of the parables in the separate gospels. Listen to what Matthew’s account of the story adds, a very helpful detail, Matthew 21:41, “They said to Him - ” “they” being the people who had heard the story, “They said to Him - ” when He asked the question “‘What, therefore, will the owner of the vineyard do to them?’ They said to Him, ‘He will bring those wretches to a wretched end.’ ”

Of course, that's not hard to figure out. That's exactly what they ought to do. But it's important to note that the people affirmed that. They said to Him, "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end." Secondly, they also said, "And will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the *proper* season." That's the people's conclusion. That's their conclusion.

Yes, two things, he will destroy them, and he will give the land into the care of others. That is the only sensible answer. That is the only reasonable answer. That's exactly what the people said. And our Lord affirms that in verse 16, "Yes, he will come and destroy these vine-growers and will give the vineyard to others." That is exactly right. Everybody knows that. Obviously, if you have destroyed them, you have to give the vineyard to somebody else to care for. This is appropriate judgment and no one would argue with it. This is exactly what the people said. "He will destroy those wretches and give his land to someone else." That's what the people said. They were absolutely right. They are now inside the story. They are now inside the story.

What is the explanation? What does this story mean? That's the illustration, listen to the explanation. Second half of verse 16. "And when they heard it, they said, 'May it never be.' " Well, this is strange. What do you mean? The people when they heard it said, "May it never be," *m genoito* in Greek, the strongest negative possible in the Greek language. No, no, no. No, can't be, can't happen. Never, never, never.

If they just said, "He will destroy those vine-growers and give the vineyard to someone else," why would they then say, "No, no, no, no. Don't let it happen. That can't be"? I'll tell you why. Because they had come to understand the meaning. Please notice the sentence again at the end of verse 16, "And when they heard it - " Heard? The Greek verb is *akou,* from which we get "acoustic." It means "to comprehend." It means "to perceive by hearing." It means "to understand." It means "to grasp." It means "to get it."

For example, in Revelation chapters 2 and 3 there is a repeated phrase, "Let him who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches." That's repeated again and again and again, "Let him who has ears to hear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches." It's not talking about hearing sounds, not talking about hearing words, talking about grasping messages. And that's the way *akou* is used throughout the New Testament. Hearing in the sense of understanding.

They said, "Kill those vine-growers and replace those vine-growers." And then they got it, whether it was such an obvious story that the epiphany was momentary, or whether Jesus explained it to them, they got it. And as soon as they understood it, they said, "No, no, no, no, no, no. Whoa, whoa. Can't have that. Can't have that. Can't do that. We can't kill those people, and we can't take away the vineyard from them. Can't happen. They understood the meaning of the story. They got it and they panicked.

What did they understand? I'll tell you. Let's go through the story again and see what they understood. "A man planted a vineyard." The man is God. The vineyard is Israel. Clearly, this is God establishing Israel. The originator and possessor of Israel is God. Israel is His people, chosen, elect, formed out of the loins of Abraham, carried through the patriarchs, flourishing into a full nation, having been recovered from Egyptian captivity. This is Israel. In fact, in Isaiah 5, wonderful opening 7 verses of Isaiah's prophecy. Isaiah says, "God planted a vineyard," and answers the question who is this vineyard? This vineyard is the house of Israel, Isaiah 5:7.

And God's planting of Israel is described in detail. God planted them "on a fertile hill," the wonderful land of Canaan. God planted "a choice vine," that is to say the genetics of Jews is among the noblest of all humanity. God hedged them, protected them, put a moat around them, a hedge around them, built a winepress, could be the symbol of the sacrificial system, a tower of protection. God did everything He could do and had every right to expect good grapes, Isaiah writes. But He received *beushim,* sour berries.

God did everything He could in planting Israel to get back a good crop. God got absolutely nothing, and Isaiah says God is going to trample down His vineyard, and no rain is going to rain on it. It's going to be crushed and dried up. And Isaiah is describing an apostate, unfaithful, disobedient, rebellious, blasphemous Israel about to be taken into captivity by the Babylonians in 586.

Here we are again in language very reminiscent of Isaiah 5, and Jesus is saying, "Nothing has changed." Nothing has changed. Israel is God's vineyard, planted, adding the elements that Matthew adds, with a winepress, with a tower, with a hedge of protection, all of that. God planted Israel. That language also is in Psalm 80:8-16, where God likens Israel to a vineyard, Jeremiah 2:21, very familiar picture of Israel. It would have been very familiar to the people. They knew well the Babylonian captivity. They knew well the Isaiah passage because it's followed immediately with the great Isaiah 6 vision of God.

But who are the vine-growers? God plants the vineyard. Who are the vine-growers? They are the ones that God puts in charge of caring for His vineyard, His nation. Who would that be? Religious leaders, those responsible to lead the people in the ways of God, to lead them to obedience and true worship, those given care over the nation. Never owners, always stewards of God's possession. God is the one who owns His own nation. These are the ones given responsibility for leading spiritually. Kings, predominantly priests, and even including some self-appointed false prophets, any and all who had responsibility for the spiritual welfare of Israel, predominantly the priesthood.

So God establishes His nation out of the loins of Abraham. God puts it in the hands of the priesthood, and of certain rulers: Godly men, elders, wise men; and God goes on a journey for a long time. What's that? Two thousand years of Old Testament history. Two thousand years of Old Testament

history.

Until God decides at certain intervals to send certain slaves to get His crop. He remains away and doesn't actually come back until He comes back in the form of His Son. But the long journey pictures Old Testament history. God gave to the religious and spiritual leaders of Israel the care of the nation, to kings and priests, from the patriarchs, Abraham on. In Jesus' time, it was the high priests, the chief priests, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, elders and leaders. They had the spiritual stewardship of the nation.

Verse 10, literally the Greek says, "At the time, at the prescribed time, at the appropriate time," we could say "harvest time," as the NAS does, "At appropriate seasons in the history of Israel, God sent servants." Who are they? Prophets, true prophets, Old Testament prophets, sent to Israel to bring the nation God's Law, to return the nation to God's Law, to obedience and to righteousness. The prophets came when they came to call the nation to produce spiritual fruit for the honor and glory of God.

From Moses all the way to John the Baptist, they all had the same responsibility. They were all calling the people to walk according to God's law, to love God, to repent of their sin, to turn to God, to cry out to God for forgiveness and salvation, and to be obedient to His Law. That was the message and the ministry of all the true prophets. They were sent from God to turn the people away from their sin back to the true God. They were sent to turn the people back to the Law of God, back to holiness, back to true repentance and the pursuit of righteousness. There were many of them through the two thousand plus years of history, from Moses to John the Baptist.

And how were they treated? Well, according to the story, they were mistreated. They were beaten. They were treated with shame. They were wounded. They were cast out. To use all the language, they were killed. They were stoned. The history of Israel is a history of apostasy, defection, spiritual rebellion. The history of Israel is a history of prophets coming to call Israel back, and prophets being rejected, and mistreated, and maligned, and abused, and killed.

Justin Martyr with his dialogue with Trypho accuses the Jews of having sawn Isaiah in half with a wooden saw. And the he it is, who was referred to in Hebrews 11:37 as one sawn asunder. Jeremiah constantly mistreated, thrown into a pit, tradition says the Jews stoned him to death. Ezekiel faced the same hatred and hostility. Amos had to flee for his own life. Zechariah was rejected and stoned, and Micah was punched in the face.

One writer says, "The uniform hostility of kings, priests, and people to the prophets is one of the most remarkable features in the history of the Jews. The amount of hostility varied, and it expressed itself in different ways on the whole, increasing in intensity, but it was always there. Deeply as the Jews lamented the cessation of prophets after the death of Malachi, they generally opposed them as long

as they were granted to them. Until the gift was withdrawn, they seemed to have little pride in this exceptional grace shown to the nation and little appreciation of it or thankfulness for it."

You remember the Pharisees and the scribes said to Jesus, they said, "You know, if we had been around when our forefathers abused the prophets, we never would have done that." It's been 400 years when you come to the life of Christ since there's been a prophet. They feel like they would never have done to the prophets what their forefathers did. And were they to have prophets then, they wouldn't do that. That was wishful thinking, for they were the ones so eager to kill not just the prophets but the Son Himself.

To understand this, go back to Jeremiah chapter 7. I want to just show you without going through every story of every prophet, just general comments from God on this issue. Jeremiah 7:23. Jeremiah 7:23. A couple of passages here will make the point. Jeremiah 7:23. "This is what I commanded them saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people; and you will walk in all the ways which I command you, that it may be well with you.' Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in *their own* counsels *and* in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward."

Listen to this. Verse 25, "Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets - " there they are, the slaves, the servants are the prophets " - daily rising early and sending *them*. Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did evil more than their fathers." It just kept getting worse, even when God sent His prophets.

Jeremiah 25:4. "And the Lord has sent to you all His servants the prophets - " the preachers " - again and again, but you have not listened or inclined your ear to hear, saying, 'Turn now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell in the land which the Lord has given to you and your forefathers forever and ever; and do not go after other gods to serve them and worship them, do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will do you no harm.' " That's the message the prophets gave and they gave it again, and again, and again, time after time, after time. Verse 7, " 'Yet you have not listened to Me,' declares the Lord, 'in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm.' " And then He goes on to pronounce judgment and destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians, verse 11. "This whole land shall be a desolation and a horror and these nations - " these people " - shall serve the king of Babylon 70 years." The Babylonian Captivity was the judgment of God on a people who were rebellious, and apostate, and disobedient, and would not listen to the prophets.

Turn to Matthew chapter 23 in the New Testament, most notable chapter. This insight will help you to understand how well known the history of killing the prophets was among the Jews. Matthew 23, this is Jesus speaking against the leaders, verse 29, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You

build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous." That was their hypocrisy in part. They were hypocrites on every front. But one of their hypocritical acts was to try to revere the prophets that their forefathers had hated, abused, mistreated, and killed. And what they did was try to adorn the monuments of the prophet. They didn't want people to think that they were like that. They were far better. They would never do that to a true prophet. So they build greater tombs to honor the prophets, adorn the monuments of the righteous.

And they "say - " verse 30 " - if we had been *living* in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in *shedding* the blood of the prophets," as I said a few moments ago. They wanted to present themselves as better than their forefathers. Their forefathers were well known for having slaughtered the prophets.

But, Jesus didn't see them that way. Verse 33, "You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell? Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city." Jesus is saying, "You're no different because as soon as My apostles go out and the preachers of the gospel go out, you're going to do exactly to them what your fathers did to the prophets of old. You're going to persecute them. You're going to execute them." And that's what they did. All the apostles, with the exception of John, were martyred. The slaughter was on.

Verse 35 says, "In fact, on you may fall *the guilt of* all the righteous bloodshed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar." How apostate are they? They murdered the last of the prophets that they murdered in the temple between the altar and the Holy Place.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem - " verse 37 says Jesus " - who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!" That's the history. That's the history of Israel. Apostate, disobedient, unbelieving, rebellious, idolatrous, blasphemous, slaughtering the prophets.

In Luke 6:22-23, our Lord is giving the beatitudes and one of them is, "Blessed are you when men hate you - " Luke 6:22. "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man." Jesus says that because He knows that's what's going to happen to that first generation of Jewish believers at the hands of Jewish leadership. He knows that. And then He says in verse 23, "Be glad when it happens and leap *for joy*, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets." Nothing new. Nothing new at all.

In chapter 11 of Luke, again in verse 49, "For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and *some* they will persecute, in order that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this

generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house *of God*; I tell you, it will be charged against this generation - " or this nation.

This is the nation throughout its history, its long history, the Old Testament time, this is a nation that abused, and persecuted, and slaughtered the messengers, the servants that God sent to claim a right to the good grapes from the vineyard He had planted.

In the 13th chapter of Luke - you remember this because it wasn't too long ago that we looked at it - again, the same kind of language, Luke 13:34, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *the city* that kills the prophets - " same as it was said in Matthew 23 " - and stones those sent to her!" This is what you do. Stephen, Acts 7, the first Christian martyr is preaching, listen to what he says in Acts 7:51, "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in your heart - " he's preaching to the Jews in Jerusalem " - you are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?" Wow. Stephen asks, "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murders you have now become."

You killed the prophets that announced the coming of the righteous one, and now you've killed the righteous one. "And when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, *began* gnashing their teeth at him," and they stoned him to death, and he died. And Saul was in hearty agreement with it, and breathing out, threatening slaughter, ravaging the church, went on the killing spree in that first generation, thinking he was upholding Judaism. This is how it's always been.

God is patient. A prophet comes, another prophet, another prophet, another prophet, same treatment, same treatment. Finally, in interpreting the story, go back to Luke 20. The owner asks the all-important question, "What shall I do?" Verse 13, "I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him." That's unmistakable, isn't it? That is unmistakable. God sent His beloved Son, Luke 3:22. "This is My beloved Son," God said at His baptism. Matthew 17:5. "This is My beloved Son," God said at His transfiguration. In Mark's account of this parable, Mark says, "He had one more to send, a beloved Son." John 3:16. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."

He is distinct from all other messengers. He is not a slave, He is a Son. And God has only one. God's last Old Testament messenger, prophet of all prophets. He is the heir to all that God possesses. He is the one who has all divine authority, all divine rights to obedience and to honor, as well as all divine rights to judgment. They should have respected Him. They should have reverenced Him. They should have revered Him. They should have been shamed into respecting Him after what they had done to the prophets who announced His coming.

And it's not as if they didn't know who He was. Please notice the story, "When the vine-growers saw Him." Jesus' whole life was marked with endless evidences that He was indeed the Son of God, the

Messiah. It was unmistakably clear. And the vine-growers say, “This is the heir.” What an indictment. “This is the heir.”

They knew what His claims were. They knew He substantiated them by power over disease, power over death, power over demons. They knew His miracle power. They knew there was no explanation for Him other than that He was divine. Why didn’t they believe? Listen to this, John 12:42. “Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.”

It never was a question of evidences. Never. They even say, “We know that You speak the true words of God.” They never argued about His miracles. They never denied one miracle, ever. It just was not acceptable to them to believe in Him because they loved their own religion and the praise that it brought them more than they loved God. It was not a head issue, it was a heart issue. He is the Messiah. He is the only and beloved Son of God.

And so Jesus in the story, once it dawned on the crowd, is telling His own murderers that He knows exactly what they are about to do in two days. They are going to kill Him. They’re going to kill Him because they want control of the inheritance, “that the inheritance may be ours.” Control over the religious system. Control over their own version of the kingdom of God.

They want to burn the heretics. This has been done throughout Christian history by those who see themselves as the self-appointed stewards of the kingdom of God. They want control. They want their synagogue world and their temple world the way it is and Jesus is a real problem. Let’s kill Him so we can hang onto our religion.

Kill Him. What does that refer to? The crucifixion in two days. They have been long planning it. They were going to pull it off fast. It also says, “they threw Him out of the vineyard and killed Him.” “Threw Him out of the vineyard,” what does that picture? Complete rejection, throwing Him out of their nation as an outcast. Some see even an indication that He was crucified outside the city, which they likely did to symbolize that He had been rejected by the nation. He died outside the city.

This is their history. This is sweeping history. And when the people understood it, they realized what they had said. “Destroy those wretched vine-growers, give the vineyard to somebody else.” What have we just said? We’ve just condemned our own religion and our own nation. That’s why they respond at the end of verse 16, “May it never be! No, no, no, no. We take it back. We take it back. We take it back. We should never have said it. We should never have said it.”

Destroy? What is that? Verse 16, “He will come and destroy these vine-growers.” Divine judgment, already predicted, 13:35 of Luke, “Your house is left to you *desolate*.” Go back to 19:42. “If you had

known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a bank before you, surround you and hem you in on every side, level you to the ground and your children within you, not leaving one stone upon another, because you didn't recognize the time of your visitation." The time when the Son of God visited you.

Destruction, this is prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by the Romans. Tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Jews were slaughtered and the city and the temple were leveled to the ground. From that moment on, no priesthood has ever existed in Israel, no temple, no sacrifices, no ceremonies, no Sadducees, no Pharisees, no chief priests, no high priests, the whole system ended, never again has it been restored. The people understood the story and they panicked. This is the destruction of our leaders, this is our displacement from the place of blessing.

It didn't take long. In a few days these people who are horrified here, "No, no, no, no, no, no, no - no, no, we want You to be our King. We don't want You to do this. We would never kill the Son. We would never kill the Son. We want You to be our Messiah." Those same people who are saying that here, in effect, are going to say, "Crucify Him, crucify Him, crucify Him." And the people will follow their leaders right into judgment, right into destruction, and right into hell.

And there's one other element. "He will give the vineyard to others." Who are the others? That's for next week. And that is the high point of the story. That's the culmination of the story. It's really -

You say, "Well wait a minute, that's the church." Not that simple. If it were that simple, I would have said it. There's much more. And it's really powerful truth. That's for next week.

How do we draw this together? Pretty easy, really. The consequences are eternal for those who reject Jesus Christ, whether the Jews of His own day, or Jews and Gentiles in this day, or in any day in between or beyond. You either love the Lord Jesus Christ or you're cursed.

You either acknowledge Him as the Son of God, the only Savior, and put your trust and faith in Him, or you're doomed and damned. And judgment is promised on all those who rejected Christ. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ," says the Scripture, "let him be cursed. Let him be doomed."

God has given to you certain privilege to hear the truth, to know the truth, to hear the message of Christ. Not everybody in the world has that privilege. You have. In that sense, you have been under the knowledge of the truth, which produces responsibility. What are you going to do with that truth? You going to be like the leaders of Israel who, because something else is more important to you that you possess, the love of your own sin, or your own system, or your own philosophy, or your own relationships, you will spurn Christ and hold onto what condemns and damns? This is the time to let go of everything, put your trust in Christ so that you're not destroyed and added to the number of

those who forfeited all the potential and offered blessings of His kingdom.

Father, as we come to the end of this discussion this morning and not nearly the end of the text, we're far enough to know the urgency of acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. For those who have been given the privilege of revelation of who He is bear the responsibility to believe, to embrace Him as Savior, or suffer the most fearful eternal consequences. May Your grace be abundant today in a world that largely is dominated by those who don't know and love Christ.

May we not follow the majority, the many on the road to destruction, but may everyone who is here come the narrow way, embracing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior with a heart of penitence, that we might enter in to joy and blessing, that we might become a part of the people who are the new stewards of kingdom truth and blessing, not just for time but for eternity. May Your powerful work of grace and salvation operate in hearts today. Bring many to Your Son, we pray in His name. Amen.

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