

**Luke 20:9-19**

Irrelevant. Inapplicable. Those are the two words that chased around my brain when I first studied this parable. Just being honest. I asked myself over and over again: what does a message tailor made for people with Jesus murder on their hearts say to people who adore him? I'm not the only one asking that question. One commentary I read went out of its way to say, "We must do justice to the timeless character of all parables." Because, in this case, it would be easy to not do that. We could say, "They already killed Jesus. You can't do it again. This parable can't help me."

I don't mean to shock you, but the Bible says that it is possible to kill Jesus again. And if the Bible says that you can re-crucify the Son of God it's not a leap to think that we too can be guilty of it. That's how this parable from Luke 20 helps us. It shows us what this would look like in our lives and how we can avoid it. Listen to Jesus' story.

**"A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. 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. 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."**

So what's the parable saying about people who crucify Jesus? Maybe your first reaction is to say, "Well, it's saying these people wouldn't give God their fruit. They must not have been giving enough in the offering plate." And that's an honest take on the parable, but it's not what the parable is emphasizing. Do a 180 on that thought and you'll have it. This parable isn't examining how people give to God. This parable is examining how we receive from God.

Let me show you what I mean. Notice in the parable that what's emphasized is who God sends and how the people receive that gift. A servant gets sent - a messenger or a prophet you might call him. Each time a messenger comes that God hopes the people will receive well they get treated in a progressively aggressive way. Try to remember that. The treatment of God's messages is progressively aggressive.

The first servant comes. He gets beaten and sent away. A second servant comes. This time they beat him, and treat him dishonorably, and then send him away. We're not quite sure what it means that they treated him dishonorably, but it

doesn't take much of an imagination to think of what that might mean. A third servant comes. They traumatize him. It's translated, "wounded," here, but Luke literally says they traumatized him. This time they don't send him away. This time they throw him out. Like I said before, the people get progressively aggressive. Then the Owner sends his Son. They kill him. And that's how they arrived at crucifying the Son of God. The tenants didn't start out trying to do it. They worked up toward it. You might say that they had to grow into it.

There are quite literally about a 1,001 different ways for this to happen in our lives. To be exact, there are as many ways to arrive at crucifying the Son of God as there are sins. All it takes is turning one of those 1,001 different sins into a mortal sin and you've crucified the Lord of glory again. A mortal sin happens when you decide that you're willing to hurt and harm Jesus by doing something that he doesn't want you to do *on purpose*. It will look something like this inside you, "I know what Jesus thinks about this. I don't care. I'm doing it anyway and I plan to enjoy it." A mortal sin means that you know it's wrong; you're not going to fight the temptation at all; you plan to enjoy it; and you're definitely going to do it again. Like I said before, that kind of aggression toward Jesus is never the starting point. It happens progressively over time.

I have a good friend of mine who told me his story of how this happened in his life. He had heard it preached, "Drink in moderation. Drunkenness is sinful." At first, he lived that way. Then one Saturday night he met a new friend, Jack Daniel. He sent God's message home empty handed that night. Soon Saturday nights were always time with Jack. Messengers came telling him he was drinking too much. They bothered him. He figured since people were so bothersome he might as well join Jack on Tuesdays too. The family tried an intervention. They just ticked him off more. It wasn't long before my friend was spending his waking moments either with Jack or longing for it. It was just like Jesus had described in the story. He had never intended to arrive there, but there he was.

And you know what the great lie is for people in this condition? Jesus tells us in the parable. They come to the conclusion that Jesus is so inconvenient and so wrong-headed that they will not be able to have the life they want unless he is gone. In fact, they figure that if he is gone, then finally they can have it all. Did you notice that in the parable? The tenants said, "Here comes the heir. Let's kill him. Then we will have the inheritance." And that's how it goes. Any of your potential idols are happy to take you there - career, sex, children, money, and community status - just to name a few. You don't start out planning to idolize your career. You arrive there when you feel the rush of success, the pull of a flush wallet, and the joy of accolades so that Jesus feels like someone who nags you to go to church instead of someone you worship at church. You don't start out making your kids the center of your life. You arrive there when your self-worth hinges on how many points they score in a game or how good their grades are and you wonder how else you can feel valued and important in the world. You don't start out planning to live with your boyfriend. You arrive there when it's too expensive to live apart, he won't commit

to you, and you'd rather lose Jesus than him. You get the picture.

In life, if Jesus is someone you try to appease; if Jesus is someone who nags you; if Jesus or one of his reps is someone you try to avoid; if Jesus is someone you occasionally put into your head and your heart, then you're in big trouble. To use the picture that Jesus and the prophets used: he's not some stray rock laying around a construction site that you may possibly trip over or may accidentally fall on your head. If he's that in your life, then here's his promise to you: he will crush you and break you.

Now, I've told you all of this not because I believe this is happening to any one of you here. I'm telling you this so that it won't happen to any one of you here. This info makes us more spiritual wily. We can see trends. We can make observations. We can notice when Jesus starts to look like a useless building block in our lives. We can tear down buildings that don't have him as the cornerstone – the rock upon which our entire faith and life is built. And we're handed the way to make that happen. Correction. He makes it happen in us. That's the power of the gospel. Let's get back into the story Jesus told.

Remember the tenants had progressed in their aggression messenger by messenger. They beat one and sent him home. They beat and treated dishonorably a second one and sent him home. A third one they traumatized and then threw him out of the vineyard. Then we get this key, key, key part of the parable, **“Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’” (v. 13)** This parable is told in other gospels, but only Luke gives us the insider's view of the Father's heart. It's wild, unpredictable and totally irrational - at least at first glance.

Now I want you to think this through with me. If you were the owner of that original vineyard, how would you approach this leadership issue? After one servant was sent back beaten up and with nothing, what would you have done? My guess is if you're a businessperson with this contract, you're going to have it lawfully enforced. You're probably going to march over there and deal with the people who are stealing from you. Am a right? I believe it shows a lot of grace and optimism to send a second servant. And then after they treated the second servant like that it's just sheer craziness to send a third. But I guess if you sent a second one, maybe (just maybe!) you give them three strikes and then they're out (although I still think it's all grace here). But then after three you're out. That's it. There's no more grace. You're the owner and you're going to go and deal with their thievery and aggravated assaults with the full force of the law. That's how we'd do it. But now look at how God's mind works. He's so wild, unpredictable, and ridiculously full of grace! He deliberates with himself. He thinks it through. His heart just bleeds. He asks himself, “What shall I do?” And then comes what I like to think of as the gospel dagger. I will send my son, whom I love. The second part is the dagger. Jesus is the apple of the Father's eye. He's his joy and delight. He would send him.

And here's the part that always gets me. The Father wasn't dumb. He knew he was sending him to sure and certain death. He knew they'd take him outside the city and epically shame and embarrass him on a tree. He knew it all. And after he deliberated with himself and asked himself, "What shall I do?" the Father's heart led him to do it anyway. His heart and his grace just ruled the day! And this was his rationale. "Perhaps they will respect him." I know teachers say that you're not supposed to say the word dumb, but doesn't that sound dumb? People with a history of such a violent, ignorant streak would harm Jesus not respect him. It just sounds dumb.

But it's not. It's the gospel! And it works. It works exactly as the Father planned. Perhaps they will respect my Son if I send him. That's exactly what happened in me. And it's exactly what happened in you. That's the Father's gospel genius. Dumb as it sounded, it worked! He sent his Son to us and we respect him for it. We more than respect him. We adore him for it. We trust him. We love him. That's how this parable heals us. My friend that I told you about has now dumped Jack Daniel's for a wild, irrational Father who sent him the Son he loved. No child of yours, no career, no amount of money, no uncommitted boyfriend, nothing or no one loves you with so much wild, irrational, and free grace. But our Father did. Not because he's dumb, but because he's genius. He knew that showing his heart like that would draw us to him and lead us to build our faith and our lives on his only son, the cornerstone. It took just one crucifixion for that to happen in us. Just one. And, we pray that by the power of seeing God's heart for us in this parable, there won't be anymore. Amen.