



Cornerstone

God offers salvation through faith in Jesus alone.

LUKE 20:9-19

Many of us have ignored a warning issued or a directive given and faced the consequences. Ignoring God's warnings and His Son have far greater consequences. The central message of the Bible is that God offers salvation through faith in Jesus alone. Ignoring the gospel puts us in danger of facing judgment, but forgiveness is available for all who turn to Jesus.

Think about a time you ignored the wisdom of someone who was trying to help you. What factors contributed to your ignoring them?

UNDERSTAND THE **CONTEXT**

LUKE 20:1–21:38

This section of Luke focuses on Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem. Mark's Gospel relates that after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, He went to the temple and looked around, observed the conditions, then returned to Bethany to spend the night. On the following morning, He returned, cleared the temple, and began teaching (Mark 11:11-17). Seeing the order of events helps us understand Jesus' actions as being deliberate and not the result of an emotional impulse.

This week's study focuses on the parable in Luke 20:9-19. The immediate context of the story is Jesus' confrontation with the Jewish leaders in the temple. They challenged His authority as He taught in the temple. They believed Jesus was undermining the authority they had worked hard to establish.

This context is important for two reasons. First, it sets the stage for the climactic confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders. The Pharisees, chief priests, and the teachers of the law knew this parable was directed against them, as we will see in verse 19. Second, in providing a critique of the way the temple religion functioned, Jesus was implicitly providing a new way through which God can be worshiped—namely, through Him and Him alone.

This parable lays out the very situation that was coming to fruition between Jesus and the religious leaders. They were so blinded by their self-righteousness and their hatred for Jesus that they couldn't see how this parable exposed their own hearts. The question we might ask of ourselves in this text is this: What is the condition of our own hearts as we are confronted with the truths of Jesus? The authority of Jesus Christ confronts our attitudes directly.

Read Luke 20:9-19, focusing on the treatment of the servants and son in the parable. What does the treatment of the servants and the son reveal about the heart of the tenant farmers?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE SERVANTS (LUKE 20:9-12)

⁹ Now he began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, leased it to tenant farmers, and went away for a long time. ¹⁰ At harvest time he sent a servant to the farmers so that they might give him some fruit from the vineyard. But the farmers beat him and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹ He sent yet another servant, but they beat that one too, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. ¹² And he sent yet a third, but they wounded this one too and threw him out.

VERSE 9

In this *parable*, Jesus effectively laid out the history of redemption with a focus on how Israel had failed to respond to God and an indictment of how the religious leaders had led the people.

The key to understanding the parable is knowing that it was God (the *man* in the parable) who planted a vineyard. Everyone who heard Jesus’ voice would have connected the *vineyard* with God’s people. In Isaiah, God appears as the vinedresser who diligently worked the vineyard (Israel), but the vineyard produced only wild grapes (Isa. 5:1-7). In Jesus’ parable, however, the conflict is not between God and Israel, but between God and the leaders who were responsible for caring for His people.

God expected a crop of righteousness; instead, a crop of violence and oppression was produced. Who was to blame? Who was given care over the vineyard? In the parable, the vineyard was under the care of *tenant farmers*. These tenant farmers represented the religious leaders of Israel, for they had been tasked with caring for the people of God. Their primary responsibility was to teach and shepherd the people according to the Word of God—the law and promises of the Old Testament.

VERSES 10-12

Another set of characters is introduced: the three servants, who represent the prophets. Throughout Israel’s history, prophets were sent to remind Israel and her leaders of their calling—namely, to hear and heed to the word of the Lord. The prophets were the mouthpieces

of God, reminding people of His Word and holding them accountable to that Word. Prophets were sent by God to warn of the impending judgment of unfaithfulness. This is interesting considering the context of this parable. In the situation preceding this parable, the debate was about the prophetic authority of John the Baptist. John was the last of the prophets, and his message echoed the message of the Old Testament prophets but centered on the person of Jesus and prepared the way for Jesus. For Israel, this was another opportunity to heed the promises and warnings of God's word.

In response to the word of the Lord, the people did not incline their ears to hear. In the stubbornness of their evil hearts, they turned away. God persistently sent His servants, the prophets. But the people stiffened their necks. Moreover, the religious leaders cast the prophets out. They **beat** them, treated them **shamefully**, and **sent** them **away**.

Jesus had mourned over Jerusalem because Israel killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent by God to seek their repentance (Luke 13:34). In rejecting the prophets (who were the mouthpieces of God), they had rejected the very word of God.

What are the dangers of ignoring God's Word and the messengers sent to deliver that Word? How does the treatment of God's messengers reveal the true nature of a person's heart?

THE SON (LUKE 20:13-16a)

¹³ **“Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What should I do? I will send my beloved son. Perhaps they will respect him.’** ¹⁴ **“But when the tenant farmers saw him, they discussed it among themselves and said, ‘This is the heir. Let’s kill him, so that 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? ^{16a} He will come and kill those farmers and give the vineyard to others.”**

VERSE 13

Thus far in the parable, the word of God has been disregarded. The servants of God have been despised. Therefore, the vineyard

owner sent his **beloved son**. The language in the parable, *my beloved son*, is important. Jesus was referring to Himself.

The word *beloved* translates a term that not only means “dearly loved,” but also implies uniqueness. The parallel to Jesus is obvious. Jesus was the one and only Son of God (John 1:14; 3:16). After having sent many prophets over the centuries, when the time was right, God sent His unique Son to provide salvation (Gal. 4:4-5).

One singular difference separates the parable from God’s purpose in sending Jesus. The owner in the parable thought the stewards of the vineyard might **respect** the son. He seemed to believe the problem had been the farmer’s attitude toward the servants rather than their disdain for the owner. If he sent his son, the stewards may respond differently. In contrast, God sent His Son knowing Jesus would be rejected and crucified. In fact, this is exactly why the Father sent the Son (Acts 2:23). Jesus came not simply to be a representative of God among human beings. His purpose was to die on the cross to atone for human sin and to make forgiveness and salvation possible.

**How was the son an extension of the father in this parable?
How does Jesus represent the Father in our world?**

VERSES 14-16a

With logic that illustrates sin’s blindness, the tenants decided that if they killed the son, then they would inherit the land. It is helpful to set this parable in the cultural context of the ancient world. In ancient custom, the coming of the only son would suggest that the owner had died and that the heir had to come to claim his inheritance. The tenants did not want to bow to the son’s authority. They resolved to kill him, thus removing the last obstacle to their complete control of the vineyard.

The father’s reaction to hearing about his son’s murder was threefold. First, he would **come**. No longer would the owner depend on others to deliver his message. He would take personal action. Second, he would **kill those farmers**. He would execute judgment on the ones who killed his son. Third, the owner would **give the vineyard**

to others. Jesus' listeners should have been appalled at the prospect of losing their favored status and being summarily replaced by others who might be more productive and fruitful.

It's not by coincidence that Jesus told this parable in the shadow of the cross. He was the true son of the vineyard owner, God. Just like the son in the parable, He would be cast out and killed. But as we know looking back, Jesus is the Son who willingly gave Himself.

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Those who believe will be granted the riches of the vineyard owner, God. It was Christ's love for us that compelled Him to endure the cross so that we might be granted the riches of God. Jesus' sacrifice was not only proof of God's love but was necessary to provide the means for our salvation. If we reject such a great salvation, we bear the results of our sin, which is death. If we repent of sin and trust in Christ, we can receive God's wonderful gift of eternal life.

For what common reasons might a person refuse to recognize and submit to Jesus' authority as the Son?

THE STONE (LUKE 20:16b-19)

^{16b} But when they heard this they said, "That must never happen!"

¹⁷ But he looked at them and said, "Then what is the meaning of this Scripture: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone? ¹⁸ Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but on whomever it falls, it will shatter him." ¹⁹ Then the scribes and the chief priests looked for a way to get their hands on him that very hour, because they knew he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people.

VERSES 16b-18

The point of God's judgment was clear as the crowd responded, "***That must never happen!***" Jesus cited Psalm 118:22 to make His point. The psalm used the symbolism of the foundation stone that is crucial

to a building. Jesus was saying, *Look, I am the foundation stone of God's plan to build the people of God.* In fact, Jesus is not only the foundation on which the building is built; He is also the capstone that rests at the top.

Jesus declared that ***everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces.*** This statement recalls Isaiah 8:14-15, which describes the Messiah as a stumbling stone on which many would fall and be broken. The second line could be viewed as an example of Hebrew parallelism: ***But on whomever it falls, it will shatter him.*** By repeating the first line with different language, the second statement strengthens the meaning. The overall connotation emphasizes God's judgment of people who reject Him and His Son.

Jesus is the cornerstone for those who accept Him but the millstone for those who reject Him.

Jesus is still the cornerstone today. Most people do not mind the church, as long as it is beneficial to the community. They don't mind if we claim Jesus as a good teacher or as a moral example—until we stand up and say that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. All of our religious efforts cannot accomplish what God demands. Jesus is the cornerstone for those who accept Him but the millstone for those who reject Him.

How is Jesus both the foundation for forgiveness and a source of judgment at the same time?

KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

As soon as they are capable of moral action, humans become transgressors and are under condemnation (Rom. 3:23).

VERSE 19

The *scribes and the chief priests* understood that Jesus had ***told this parable against them***. Consequently, they ***looked for a way to get their hands on him***. They determined to destroy Him. The phrase ***that very hour*** could mean they wanted to seize Him immediately. It also could indicate that from that *hour* they looked for ways to arrest Him. But they did not dare move against Him in that setting because ***they feared the people***.

The religious leaders eventually killed Jesus to shut Him up. Instead of bowing down to Jesus and accepting His authority, they refused it and hardened their hearts. Though they killed Him, He rose again. God vindicated His rejected Son in the resurrection. Because Jesus rose again, He still speaks. If the tenants in this parable were crushed for rejection of the son of the vineyard owner, what will happen to those who reject the one and only Son of God?

BIBLE SKILL: *Review other passages containing the same quote.*

Review Acts 4:11, Romans 9:23, Ephesians 2:20-22, and 1 Peter 2:4-8. How did these writers apply Psalm 118:22? How did they build off the ideas found in Luke 20? What insights do you gain about Jesus being the cornerstone?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Mistreating God’s servants points to disrespect for God.
- Believers demonstrate respect for the Father through expressing faith in Jesus.
- Failing to accept Jesus brings judgment.

Evaluate your level of support for God’s messengers today. What can you do to give greater support to the messengers God has sent your church?

As a group, make a list of people in your circles of influence who have yet to express faith in Jesus. How can you hold one another accountable for sharing the good news of the gospel with these people?

Reflect on the judgment awaiting those who reject Jesus. How should the reality of judgment fuel our sharing the gospel? What adjustments do you need to make in this area?

PRAYER NEEDS
