THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

Luke 20:9-19

Key verse 20:13

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

Hello! Good Morning. How are you? The title of my message is “The Parable of the Tenants”. Sometimes, it is called as “the Parable of the Vineyard”.

Now Jesus’ earthly ministry is fast approaching toward the final week in this world. As we saw last a couple of weeks, Jesus made a triumphant entry into Jerusalem riding a colt. People in Jerusalem enthusiastically welcomed Him shouting Hosanna! When He entered Jerusalem, what had he done first? He cleansed the temple. He drove out those merchants who were selling all kinds of animals or exchanging the money. This was the direct challenge against the temple authority and their material interest. The crowd of the people were shocked and fearful and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were very, very irritated and upset by Jesus’ action. They were trying to kill Him, but they could not find any way to do it because all the people were hung on his words (19:48). Early in the next morning, Jesus goes to the temple courts to teach. While He is teaching, the chief priest and elders confront Him. They want to know by what authority He is teaching and doing these things. Do you have any license to teach or a license to sermon in the temple? Which seminary did you graduate or which rabbi school did you come from? Jesus did not answer them directly, instead, he asked them “Tell me, where John’s baptism came from-was it from heaven or from men? His words imply that John the Baptist and He received their authority from the same source; God in heaven. However, the religious leaders did not answer Jesus’ question because they did not want to acknowledge that John’s baptism came from heaven, so did Jesus.

Today’s passage is continuation of the last week’ message. Jesus went on to tell the people this parable. Here, Jesus further pointed out their wickedness plainly. This parable seems like a brief summary of the whole Biblical history and we can think about many things, but I’d like to think about first, God who prepared the vineyard for the men, second, the men’s failure to bear the good fruits, third, what is our fruits God want us to bear and Fourth, the stone the builders rejected. I pray that God may open our spiritual eyes to see.

**I. God who prepared the vineyard for the men (19:1)**

Look at verse 9. 9He went on to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time.”

This parable is recorded in all three synoptic gospels. The Matthew gospel recorded much detailed picture of this parable.

Let’s look at Matthew 21:33. 33“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place.”

In this parable, "a man or a landowner" refers to God, "some farmers," to his chosen people, the Israel or broadly speaking, to all mankind. In the Old Testaments, the Israel is often compared to the God’s vineyard. Let’s look at Isaiah 5:1-7, which is called the Song of the Vineyard. Let’s read it responsibly.

“I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. 2He 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.3“Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. 4What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? 5Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed;  
I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled. 6I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there. I will command the clouds not to rain on it.” 7The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.”

The landowner ordered the choicest vine stocks from France and planted them. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and even built a watch tower. This vineyard is now equipped with most up to dated machines and tools for wine making. Then, he rented the vineyard to some tenant farmers and went away for a long time, may be 5-6 years or more until the vine trees become mature and bear the best grapes for wine making.

Here, we know that God made the vineyard and everything in it, and gave it to his people Israel to take care of it so that they might bear good fruits to God. In short, God gave his people Israel everything they needed. Most of all, God chose the Israelites and trained them 430 years in Egypt and led them out of Egypt for the promised land of flowing mild and honey. Let’s look at Exodus 19:5-6. “5Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.” God gave them the privilege of taking care of the vineyard as a kingdom of priest and a holy nation to produce good fruits. In addition, God gave them the task to preach the gospel of salvation to all peoples of all nations. It was the best blessing God could give them.

God gave us the best vineyard “campus mission.” Our church’s name is the University Bible Fellowship, which implies our vineyard of mission is the world campus and He expects us to take care of campus students as the first priority and serve them with 1:1 Bible study. This is a great vineyard because the campus has a great potential raising for the future leaders. I praise God who prepared the campus mission for us as our vineyard.

**II. Men’s wickedness and failure (19:10a-16)**

The tenants were blessed ones, but were corrupt. Look at verse 10a.

"At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give

Him some of the fruit of the vineyard." God did not abandon his people after giving them privileges and blessings. He watches over them to see if they are doing well. Let's see how the tenants acted when the owner sent some of his servants. Look at verse 10b. "But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed." Their act reveals that they were not thankful to the owner at all. Out of their ungratefulness, they committed rebellion against the owner.

We know the Israelites were not happy after they settled in the promise land. They thought that if they enter the promise land, which was a land of flowing milk and honey, everything would be fine, but it was not. Just as we go to the campus, we cannot expect the students to wait for us and be ready to respond to our invitation. We have to work hard to preach the word of God. It is too hard. The Israelites had to work hard and they were envious of their neighbors, Canaanites, or Philistines who are easy going and look better materially. After a while, they forgot their mission as a kingdom of priests and holy nation and they forgot why they live in the land of flowing milk and honey. We sometimes forget the real reason why we have to live this strange country as an alien. They thought that if they were materially wealthy like their neighbors, they would be happy. So instead of living a priestly nation, the Israelites worked hard to make money, so they began to worship Baal, who is the harvest god or the golden calf. They wish Baal would give them the better harvest. They abandoned their God, who guided and protected them. Prophet Hosea laments over the fallen Israelites. Look at Hosea 13:5, 6. "I cared for you in the desert, in the land of burning heat. When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot me"

The owner God wanted to remind them of their mission why they live in the land of flowing milk and honey. Look at verse 11. "He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed." The tenants were supposed to be the stewards of God. But they degenerated into gangsters. When they saw the first servant sent by the owner, their heart was sinking and outrageous. When the second servant came, they treated him with extreme cruelty and sent him back empty-handed. When the third servant came, they wounded him badly and sent him back to the owner. When we study the Old Testaments, we can see more than half of them written by the prophets depicting how God wanted the Israelites to come back to their Lord God. God had sent numerous his servants to send his messages and warnings, but they never accepted them wholeheartedly. They rejected or beaten them up or even killed them.

What did the owner of the vineyard do with them? Look at verse 13.

"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'" In this verse, we see God's long-suffering patience toward sinful mankind and still have the benefit of doubt. He desired so much to have a right relationship with them that he was willing to do anything. Finally the owner decided to send his son. What is the tenants’ response?

Look at 14-15a. 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.’ 15So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.” They discussed this matter among themselves. They knew he is the heir, so if they get rid of him, they thought the vineyard would be theirs, so they plotted this wicked scheme and executed this plot with a cold blood. It was not a crime of passion or consequence by mistake. It is so to speak, the first degree murder, deserved for life imprisonment without possibility of parole or most likely, death penalty.

What was the owner’s response to their extreme wickedness? Look at 15b-16. “What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

Jesus prophesied that they will lose their privilege of God’s chosen people and they will be expelled from the promise land. They will be restless wanderers for 2000 years all over the world. This is Jesus’ direct indictment against the Jews and religious leaders, who do not take care of the vineyard and God’s sentence for their sinful rebellion against God. Look at verse 16b. “When the people heard this, they knew it is God’s indictment against their sins. When the people heard this, they said, “May this never be!” They knew its dreadful consequences, but if they don’t repent, it is unavoidable.

**III. What is the fruit God wants us to bear?**

Is it applicable only for the Jews? I don’t think so. God has prepared his vineyard for everyone. God entrusted the best vineyard for each of us and expected us to bear the best fruit. What is our vineyard? It may be our campus or our working place or our own home. Wherever we are, we must bear the best fruit and give them to the owner. Then, what is the fruit God want us to bear?

First, God wants us to bear the spiritual fruit. Let’s look at Galatians 5:22-23. 22But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”

Our inner being must be changed to bear these kinds of fruit after we received God’s grace because our owner demands them from us. This spiritual fruit do not bear spontaneously as the time goes by unless we cultivate and take care of with prayers, self-discipline and the word of God. Their outward appearance may change, but the inner being is not changed easily. My son, David tells me that he heard the word of God from his mother’s womb, but that does not mean anything unless his inner being is changed. Some people do not bear a good fruits even as they have got the vineyard more than 40 years like me, but others bear a delightful fruits after a few years. You have to take care of it day and night as the farmers take care of their vines. Laziness is the root of all evil. Lazy farmer is a wicked farmer. That’s why early morning prayer and dedication to the word of God are a very good way to bear the good spiritual fruit. God will be very pleased to see the farmers, who get up early and take care of his or her vines. I heard that Jeff has devoted early morning prayer last 6 months and God has slowly molded him from a man of flesh into a spiritual man. God blessed him abundantly and now he is engaged to the beautiful woman of faith.

Second, God wants us to bear the evangelical fruit such as 1:1 sheep from campus ministry because we are called for this. For the name’s sake, we are called University Bible Fellowship, which means we are expected to serve the campus mission. That’s why we are struggling to serve the student at each campus. We have to invite the campus sheep, though it is not easy. God will bless missionary Monica’s never give up spirit for the campus mission.

**IV. Jesus is the capstone (17-19)**

Jesus came to this world as a son of God, who would save the world as the Messiah, but the Jews and the religious leaders rejected and crucified Him. Our Jesus is the rejected stone by the builders, but he became the capstone of God’s salvation work. What was the response of those who heard what Jesus said? Look at verse 16b. "They said, 'May this never be!'" Look at verse 17. "Jesus looked directly at them and asked, 'Then what is the meaning of that which is written: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone"?'" This came from Psalm 118:22-23. Let’s look at Psalm 118:22-23. “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 23the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.”

Jesus came to his own people the Israelites, but his own did not receive Him. Look at John 1:11. “11He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” Instead, they killed him and threw him away like a rejected stone because Jesus was a stumbling block to their sinful desires, and He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering (Isaiah 53:2-3), so they did not accept Him as the Messiah, but God used Him as the cornerstone for his salvation work.

Jesus was abandoned, killed and buried in the tomb by the sinful men. But God raised him from the dead and make him the capstone of the church and the very foundation of all mankind. In verse 18 Jesus said, "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." In this verse, "stone" refers to Jesus. No one can stand against Jesus.

In conclusion, I thank and praise God who is the owner of the vineyard and we are his tenants. I pray that God may help us to bear the best fruit in our lives. I praise Jesus who is the capstone of God’s salvation work. I pray that God may use our UBF ministry as the cornerstone for God’s world campus mission. I pray that God may use our Downey ministry as the cornerstone for the West Coast campus mission. Amen.

**One word:** Good fruit of the Vineyard