

Faithful Stewards Under Heaven's Authority

Luke 20:9-18

How many of you agree that we're living in a time when people are proud of what they should be ashamed of, a time when people call evil good and good evil? The prophet Jeremiah spoke of this when he declared, *"Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,"* says the Lord (Jeremiah 6:15). What causes this decline, this seared conscience? When we reject God's authority and let our passions and deceitful desires take charge, that's what happens.

In his book *The War on Truth*, Dr. Frank Turek warns that our culture's obsession with self-defined truth has led to moral chaos, where people celebrate rebellion against God's design while vilifying those who uphold it. From parades that celebrate what God calls sin, to denying biological reality, our society reflects Jeremiah's day—proud of sin, blind to shame. And church, it's not just "out there." We, too, can let personal desires or cultural pressures override God's authority, turning our hearts from His purpose.

This is the backdrop for today's passage, Luke 20:9-18, the parable of the tenants. We're in Passion Week, those tense final days before Jesus' crucifixion, where the air is thick with anticipation and opposition. In our last message, in Luke 20:1-8, Jesus confronted the religious leaders who dared to question His authority, and He made it clear that true spiritual power flows only from hearts fully submitted to God's rule. But He also exposed the root of their rejection: it wasn't a lack of evidence or some intellectual puzzle—it was a deep-seated heart problem, a stubborn sinful independence that refuses to bow.

Now, building on that, Jesus tells this parable of the tenants right there in the temple courts, with crowds gathered and the religious elite seething with hate. It's a story that cuts straight to the heart of the matter, revealing God's gracious authority, our human tendency to defy it, and His merciful invitation to salvation—along with a sobering reminder of what happens when we persist in rebellion.

Main idea: Jesus calls us to reject rebellion and embrace His redemptive grace as faithful stewards of God's kingdom work.

Let's unfold this truth together and as we do, I pray the Holy Spirit would search our hearts and stir us to respond.

1. God's Righteous Reign entrusts His kingdom work to stewards.

Let's begin by exploring how God's Righteous Reign entrusts His kingdom work to stewards. Jesus opens the parable in verse 9 with this vivid picture: *"A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while."* Now, to really grasp this, we have to remember that vineyards in the ancient world weren't just pretty gardens—they were symbols of God's people, carefully cultivated and entrusted with a purpose.

The man or vineyard owner in the parable represents God Himself, who lovingly plants a vineyard. Again, the vineyard pictures His people, Israel, as we see in Isaiah 5:7, where God carefully tends His chosen ones like a prized garden. Today, that vineyard includes all of us in the church, called to carry out His kingdom work.

God doesn't just drop us into this world and walk away; no, He lovingly plants us, provides everything we need—the soil of His grace, the rain of His Spirit, the sunshine of His promises—and then He entrusts His kingdom work to us as not owners but stewards.

This idea of stewardship isn't theoretical—it's deeply personal and practical. Think back to the parable of the ten minas in Luke 19:11-27, which we touched on before. There, a nobleman, standing in for Jesus, hands out resources to his servants and heads off to claim his kingdom, leaving them with clear instructions, namely to put it to work, make it grow, and be ready to give an account. And He doesn't rush back in judgment; he gives them time, space to act faithfully. That's exactly how God's righteous reign operates—gracious, patient, but with an expectation that we'll invest what He's given to us.

Your time this week, your unique talents, the relationships God has placed in your path—these are gifts He's entrusted to you, not by

chance, but to advance His kingdom's mission. They're kingdom tools, meant to advance His purposes, whether that's mentoring a young person in faith, using your skills to help a family in need, or simply being a light in your workplace conversations.

But here's where it gets real for us: How often do we forget that and start acting like owners instead of stewards? I know I have. Are you in a season where you're so wrapped up in fulfilling worldly ambitions that you've neglected your relationship with God or family devotions, and letting opportunities to serve pass you by. As Paul exhorted the Church in his day, are you making the best use of the time God has entrusted to you?

Beloved, God's reign isn't about shaming us into action; it's about inviting us into the joy of partnership with Him. Let's lean into His righteous reign and watch Him multiply what we offer.

2. Man's Rebellious Resistance rejects God's authority.

Secondly, let's consider how Man's Rebellious Resistance rejects God's authority.

Note that as the parable unfolds in verses 10 through 15a, the tone shifts dramatically, and we see the heartbreaking reality of what happens when stewardship turns to entitlement: *"When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out."*

In this parable, the servants represent God's prophets, like Elijah and John the Baptist, sent one after another to call His people to repentance and to bear the fruit of faithfulness He expects. But instead of obedience, the tenants meet them with violence and rejection. And it escalates to the unthinkable: when the owner sends his beloved son, they whisper among themselves, *"This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours,"* and they throw him out and murder him.

Brothers and sisters, this is man's rebellious resistance in raw form—a deliberate, entitled rejection of God's authority. The religious leaders listening to Jesus that day weren't confused or uninformed; they knew the prophets' messages inside and out, but their hearts were hardened by jealousy, a thirst for power, and a deep-seated desire to run the show their way. It's the same root we uncovered two weeks ago in Luke 20:1-8: rebellion isn't some intellectual standoff or a question of evidence; it's a heart-level treason, sin manifesting as fierce independence from the Creator who designed us for dependence on Him. Go back to Luke 19:14, where the nobleman's own citizens shout, "We will not have this man reign over us," choosing self-rule over the King who could set them free.

And let's not think this is ancient history or just a cultural problem "out there" that's not affecting the church. Again, we live in a world saturated with this resistance—the relentless push for "self-defined reality," where folks celebrate what Scripture calls shameful, twisting God's good design for marriage, identity, and human dignity into something that bows to fleeting feelings or corrupt ideologies. But church, the mirror turns on us too, doesn't it?

Where do we resist? Maybe it's clinging to unforgiveness, thinking we're entitled to our hate or hostility. I think of Erika Kirk, who at her husband Charlie's memorial service just days after his assassination, publicly forgave his killer—the young man who took Charlie's life. Amid the grief and national spotlight, with tens of thousands gathered at State Farm Stadium, Erika wiped away tears and said, "That man, that young man... I forgive him, because it was what Christ did, and it is what Charlie would do." She had been carrying the unimaginable weight of loss, and pain that could have poisoned her witness and hardened her heart. But as she leaned into Ephesians 4—the call to forgive as Christ forgave us—she saw how holding on would rob her of peace. It took raw honesty, prayer, and the Spirit's work, but in that surrender, freedom flooded in, turning her forgiveness into a powerful bridge for reconciliation and a testimony that pointed countless hearts to Jesus.

Again, as Tim Keller so insightfully put it, "People reject the gospel not for lack of evidence, but because their hearts cling to something they

love more than God.” That’s the tragedy of rebellion—it promises control but delivers chains. Self-rule might feel empowering in the moment, but it’s a cruel taskmaster that leaves us empty and isolated. But Christ’s lordship, on the other hand is the path to true freedom, where we trade our burdens for His yoke that’s easy and light. So, right here, right now, where are you resisting? Let’s name it before the Lord and surrender it—because His authority isn’t enslavement; it’s the key to the life we were made for.

3. Christ’s Redemptive Response mercifully offers salvation.

Now notice that the parable doesn’t end in despair, which leads us to our final point: Christ’s Redemptive Response mercifully offers salvation. In verse 13 Luke records: *“Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’”*

Even after wave after wave of rejection, God doesn’t retaliate with immediate fire from heaven; no, in His astonishing mercy, He sends His one and only Son, Jesus—the heir, the cornerstone, the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world. This is the heart of John 3:16 beating through the story: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”*

On that cross, Jesus didn’t just expose our rebellion; He absorbed its penalty, stepping in as our substitute to bear the full weight of God’s righteous wrath against sin. As Romans 3:25 tells us, He became the propitiation for our sins, which means that His death satisfied the justice of God on our behalf. Paul also makes this substitutionary sacrifice clear in 2 Corinthians 5:21: *“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”* And through that same cross, He won a decisive victory over Satan. John 16:11 declares, *“The ruler of this world is judged,”* fulfilling God’s promise in Genesis 3:15 to crush the serpent’s power. The cross is both love and triumph: Jesus paid our debt and defeated our enemy.

Yet, beloved, God's mercy is not a blank check for endless rebellion. Although He is longsuffering and slow to anger, He is also perfectly just and holy, and Scripture makes it clear that His wrath will one day be poured on the unrepentant. Those whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life will face everlasting punishment, separated forever from His presence (Revelation 20:15).

This isn't a side note or something we whisper about; it's the sobering reality Jesus Himself taught, and it's woven right into the parable's climax in verses 15b to 18: *"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others."* The crowd pushes back, "Surely not!" but Jesus looks them in the eye and quotes Psalm 118:22: *"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him"* (Luke 20:17-18). Jesus is that cornerstone—the unshakeable foundation of salvation. Fall on Him in humble repentance, and yes, you'll be broken open, yet reshaped by His grace into something beautiful and whole. But persist in rejection, and the weight of divine justice will come crashing down.

You see, this redemptive response from Christ isn't passive; it demands we respond to His kindness before it's too late. Romans 2:4-5 puts it so pointedly: *"Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed."*

Church, warning people of the wrath to come isn't hateful or outdated—it's the most loving thing we can do, pointing them to the only escape, Jesus Himself. Yet today, we have preachers who, either to avoid offense or because they're willfully crafting a softer God that fits their own discomfort, minimize His holiness, downplay the reality of hell, or even outright deny penal substitutionary atonement—the biblical truth that Jesus willingly took the punishment we deserved. Some have called it "cosmic child abuse," (Steve Chalke) painting a picture of a vengeful Father forcing His Son to suffer. Others suggest it depicts "a God who demands blood to satisfy his wrath, which [they

say is] grotesque” (Brian McLaren). But church, that’s a distortion—Scripture affirms both the wrath Jesus propitiated (satisfied) (1 John 2:2) and His triumphant victory over Satan. As Donald Macleod explains, “The charge of ‘child abuse’ is inept, ignoring that Jesus, fully God, willingly offered Himself, not coerced by the Father.” As the apostle Paul explained: All have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory (Romans 3:23), and only Jesus’ shed blood can atone for that sin. To ignore His justifiable wrath is to rob the cross of its power.

So, what does this mean for us? If you’re resisting God, saying no to Him or chasing empty desires, hear His kindness calling you to turn back today. Trust Jesus as Savior and Lord; let His blood cover your sin, and step into the freedom of His victory.

For those of us walking with Him, don’t presume on His mercy—respond by investing in His kingdom work. Do you carry a burden for a lost friend or loved one? Jesus said, *“My house shall be a house of prayer for all nations”* (Mark 11:17).

Let’s create space in our lives and our church to pray persistently for the lost and to find the burden and boldness to reach them for Christ. As Spurgeon challenged complacent believers in his day: *‘Have you no wish for others to be saved? Then you’re not saved yourself, be sure of that!’* When we truly care, we won’t stay idle or silent. And let me say this plainly, like in the parable, speaking truth in a world that hates it isn’t easy, but it’s our calling.”

Take the prophet Jeremiah, for instance—thrown into a filthy dungeon for his prophecies, yet when a desperate King Zedekiah sneaks him out for a secret meeting and begs, “Is there any word from the Lord?” Jeremiah doesn’t sugarcoat it. He looks the king in the eye and says, “There is... You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon” (Jeremiah 37:16-17). It was a message of coming judgment that could have—and nearly did—cost him his life, but Jeremiah spoke it faithfully because God’s truth demanded it.

Fast-forward to our own time, and we see that cost in the tragic assassination of Charlie Kirk. Kirk, spoke on College campuses, challenging twisted ideologies, defending life and pointing people to

Christ amid a culture that increasingly silences dissent. His death wasn't random; it was a targeted act against a voice that wouldn't bend, and it sent shockwaves through our nation.

Beloved, why are some people in our society lashing out with hate or even violence when God's truth is spoken? Today, many cling to a "false reality," believing their feelings define truth, and they demand everyone affirm it. When we don't—when we speak God's Word—they call it violence, justifying their hostility as righteousness. So this violence isn't just in the parable—it's real today. Not only do some attack truth-speakers, calling dissent hate speech, but thousands cheer them on, even celebrating their deaths. It's the same rebellion that rejected the prophets and Jesus, driven by hearts choosing self over God, blinded by the enemy's lies (Romans 1:18).

But although speaking truth can cost us, again it's our calling. Let's not shrink back, but proclaim Christ's love boldly, trusting that the truth sets people free and that it will be worth it all when we see Jesus.

Jesus Himself promised, *"Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets"* (Luke 6:22-23). We don't speak to win arguments or applause; we speak because souls hang in the balance, and eternity is at stake.

Conclusion

Beloved, as we close, let Jesus' parable resound in our hearts: God's Righteous Reign entrusts us with kingdom work that matters for eternity. Man's Rebellious Resistance rejects His authority, but it doesn't have to end there—Christ's Redemptive Response mercifully offers salvation through His cross but on those who refuse it, judgement will fall.

If you're still holding out, resisting His call, don't wait—pray with me right now: "Lord, forgive my rebellion and independence. I turn from my way and trust You as Savior and Lord; cover me with Your blood."

For those of us in Christ, let's live in the victory He won—praying fervently for the lost, proclaiming truth with love, as we steward our lives faithfully and boldly.

As Daniel Henderson reminds us in *Glorious Finish*, our true finish line isn't earthly applause but hearing Jesus say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*" (Matthew 25:21). He bore God's wrath and crushed the enemy for us—now, may we live for His glory until He returns.