

## Luke 20:9-19

<sup>9</sup>He began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard, leased it to some tenant farmers, and went away on a journey for a long time. <sup>10</sup>When it was the right time, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect his share of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenant farmers beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>11</sup>The man went ahead and sent yet another servant, but they also beat him, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. <sup>12</sup>He then sent yet a third. They also wounded him and threw him out. <sup>13</sup>The owner of the vineyard said, ‘What should I do? I will send my son, whom I love. Perhaps they will respect him.’

<sup>14</sup>“But when the tenant farmers saw him, they talked it over with one another. They said, ‘This is the heir. Let’s kill him, so that the inheritance will be ours.’ <sup>15</sup>They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. So what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup>He will come and destroy those tenant farmers and give the vineyard to others.”

When they heard this, they said, “May it never be!”

<sup>17</sup>But he looked at them and said, “Then what about this that is written:

The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?

<sup>18</sup>“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush the one on whom it falls.”

<sup>19</sup>That very hour the chief priests and the experts in the law began looking for a way to lay hands on him, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

## Broken!

### I.

They had a contract, this batch of tenant farmers. “He began to tell the people this parable: ‘A man planted a vineyard, leased it to some tenant farmers, and went away on a journey for a long time’” (Luke 20:9, EHV).

There is a term for this kind of arrangement—sharecropping. It has been done for thousands of years. The owner of a piece of property leases the land to tenant farmers to till and care for and raise crops in exchange for an agreed-upon share of the harvest.

If the owner simply provides a bare piece of ground and the tenant farmers are expected to provide all the tools and equipment and seed to raise the crops, the “share” the owner is entitled to will be smaller. On the other hand, when the owner has done much of the work, like planting a vineyard and preparing all the equipment to give every opportunity for success to the tenant farmers, the “share” the owner is entitled to will be larger. Each party knows the terms and signs on to the agreement before the season begins.

“When it was the right time, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect his share of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenant farmers beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed” (Luke 20:10, EHV).

The contract had been violated—broken. The tenant farmers had no desire and no intention to pay up on the agreed-to terms of the duly signed contract.

Have you ever known people who sign a contract and then, in their own minds, begin to change the contract? The contract specified a pure lease and management arrangement, but the lessee begins to believe that the agreement was some sort of work to own or profit-sharing with the end goal of ownership for the lessee. The problem was—it wasn’t in the contract. The lessee becomes angry with the owner, who is just sticking to the legal agreements made in the document.

The tenant farmers in the parable seem to have been that kind of lessees. They made their

contract and set the share that was to go to the owner. But when the time came to pay up, they refused. It must have been a very good season. The tenant farmers began to believe their “share” was too small.

When the servant rolled up to the loading docks to get the owner’s “share,” the tenant farmers did far worse than refuse to pay—they beat the messenger and sent him away empty-handed. Three times the owner sent servants to collect. Three times the collectors were abused—beaten, wounded, even “treated shamefully,” Jesus says. One can only imagine the kind of horrific treatment *that* might have been.

“The owner of the vineyard said, ‘What should I do? I will send my son, whom I love. Perhaps they will respect him’” (Luke 20:13, EHV). This is the point of the parable where we begin to see that the tenant farmers had let themselves dream big dreams and develop grand designs in regard to the vineyard.

“But when the tenant farmers saw him, they talked it over with one another. They said, ‘This is the heir. Let’s kill him, so that the inheritance will be ours.’<sup>15</sup> They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him” (Luke 20:14-15, EHV).

The tenant farmers were delusional. What made them think, even in killing the heir, that they would be able to keep the business?

“So what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? <sup>16</sup>He will come and destroy those tenant farmers and give the vineyard to others” (Luke 20:15-16, EHV). Broken dreams. The dreams of the tenant farmers were broken, just like they had broken their contract. Not only was the owner going to get the share to which he was entitled, they would get nothing. They were destroyed.

## II.

“When they heard this, they said, ‘May it never be!’” (Luke 20:16, EHV). The chief priests and experts in the law knew that Jesus was referring to himself as the Son of God, and the Father as the owner of the vineyard. They understood that he was pointing the finger at them. Others listening were guilty of the same kinds of attitudes and needed to hear this, too. Too many had dreamed dreams about Messiah that were misguided and inappropriate. As Jesus concluded his parable, they gave the strongest negative statement they could to imply that they had the moral high ground, and were not at all what he accused them of.

Dreaming big can be a problem for anyone, can’t it?

The tenant farmers in the parable dreamed of earthly wealth and prestige for themselves. The religious elites, and lots of other people listening to Jesus too, dreamed of an earthly Messiah who would restore power and prominence to the nation of Israel.

Broken dreams. Dreams of wealth and power and prestige focus on *this* life, not on spiritual things. Dreams of your nation’s power and prominence in the world *also* focus on *this* life and not on spiritual things.

Those who focus on *this* life are rejecting the Son—not just a son in a parable coming to collect the owner’s share of the crop, but the Son of God who came to focus on the spiritual needs of all people.

## III.

The good thing is, God sent his Son, just like the owner in the parable. Again and again God’s people have broken faith with him. Again and again they have broken his commands. Again and again they have broken away to focus on the here and now, and have rejected the truth.

“But he looked at them and said, ‘Then what about this that is written: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?’” (Luke 20:17, EHV).

“What about this that is written?” Jesus quotes from Psalm 118. Builders who were working

on a project couldn't expect every piece coming off a pallet to be exactly the same. They were using natural stone. It might have been roughly shaped with chisels, but care still had to be taken to get stone that would piece together nicely to form the finished product. Some stones were tossed to the side—shapes that simply wouldn't fit, stones that were broken.

Jesus himself was the reject—the piece the builders just couldn't figure out how to fit into the puzzle of their project.

But Jesus, the reject, has become the cornerstone. These days a cornerstone is just a place to put the date of the building. The cornerstone of the sanctuary part of our building is on a piece flying off the side, presumably where one of the beams terminates. There's no real need for a cornerstone.

Years ago a cornerstone was a much more important piece. It was carefully selected to be absolutely square—perfectly suited to use as the piece the whole structure would be measured from. If the cornerstone wasn't properly selected, the building would be unsound after construction.

The words in Greek that have been translated cornerstone can refer to several other very crucial pieces, as well. They can refer to the capstone, or last locking stone of an arch, that exerts downward and outward pressure and holds the whole arch in place. It could also refer to the lintel stone in a doorway.

Each concept refers to a very important piece in a construction project. The most important piece in the structure was a piece that had been rejected.

“Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush the one on whom it falls” (Luke 20:18, EHV). God's own Son was the reject-become-cornerstone. People broke faith with him. They broke the contract with God and rejected the Son he had sent for them. The Father's plan did not change—the Son, Jesus, completed it.

The things we have focused so much of our attention on are worthless. *We* have broken faith with him and have focused on the here and now and on ourselves. *We* have killed him by dreaming dreams that excluded God—or set him in a lower level of priority. The stone the builders rejected shatters all our worthless dreams to bits as the Lord Jesus hangs on the cross.

“What should I do? I will send my son, whom I love. Perhaps they will respect him” (Luke 20:13, EHV). The Father's love is so vast and apparent in all he does in his plan. Despite our faithlessness, he remains faithful. Rather than destroy *us*, the Father graciously gave his Son into death on the cross for us.

#### IV.

Jesus has broken the cycle of our broken-ness. When he did so, he not only *restored* our dreams, he recreated them to be dreams that point to heaven, where rust and moth will not destroy and thieves will not break in and steal. He has given us dreams that exceed our wildest earthly expectations.

The old life really is no more for us. The dreams of owning what really belongs to our Heavenly Father pales in comparison with the gift he has richly and freely given us in Christ Jesus. We have a new and better focus—a heavenly focus.

The cross does not really allow for our dreams to be self-centered. The cross takes our broken dreams and refocuses them to heaven. Christ is our cornerstone. We get to see God's mission and be about *his* work. We work as more than tenant farmers in the vineyard now. We work as shareholders in eternity. We work to bring the message of the chief cornerstone with *others* in mind, not ourselves.

Our old dreams are broken, and it is good. Our broken dreams have been transformed into a new and better life that is worth dreaming of. Amen.