

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

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LUKE XX. 9–19.

<p>9 Then began he to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time.</p> <p>10 And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent <i>him</i> away empty.</p> <p>11 And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated <i>him</i> shamefully, and sent him away empty.</p> <p>12 And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out.</p> <p>13 Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him.</p> <p>14 But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying,</p>	<p>This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be our's.</p> <p>15 So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed <i>him</i>. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?</p> <p>16 He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard <i>it</i>, they said, God forbid.</p> <p>17 And he beheld them, and said, What is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner?</p> <p>18 Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.</p> <p>19 And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them.</p>
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THE parable we have now read is one of the very few which are recorded more than once by the Gospel writers. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all give it at full length. This three-fold repetition is alone sufficient to point out the importance of its contents.

The parable, no doubt, was specially intended for the Jews to whom it was addressed. But we must not confine its application to then. It contains lessons which should be remembered in all Churches of Christ as long as the world stands.

In the first place, the parable shows us *the deep corruption of human nature*. The conduct of the wicked "husbandmen," is a vivid representation of man's dealings with God.—It is a faithful picture of the history of the Jewish Church. In spite of privileges, such as no nation ever had, in the face of warnings such as no people ever received, the Jews rebelled against God's lawful authority, refused to give Him His rightful dues, rejected the counsel of His prophets, and at length crucified His only-begotten Son. It is a no less faithful picture of the history of all the Gentile Churches. Called as they were out of heathen darkness by infinite mercy, they have done nothing worthy of the vocation wherewith they were called; on the contrary, they have allowed false doctrines and wicked practices to spring up rankly among them, and have crucified Christ afresh. It is a mournful fact that in hardness, unbelief, superstition, and self-righteousness, the Christian Churches, as a whole, are little better than the Jewish Church of our Lord's time. Both are described with painful correctness in the story of the wicked husbandmen. In both we may point to countless privileges misused, and countless warnings despised.

Let us often pray that we may thoroughly understand the sinfulness of man's heart. Few of us, it may be feared, have the least conception of the strength and virulence of the spiritual disease with which we are born; few entirely realize that "the carnal mind is enmity against God," and that unconverted human nature, if it had the power, would cast its Maker down from His throne. The behaviour of the husbandmen before us, whatever we may please to think, is only a picture of what every natural man would do to God, if he only could. To see these things is of great importance: Christ is never fully valued until sin is clearly seen. We must know the depth and malignity of our disease in order to appreciate the great Physician.

In the second place, this parable *shows us the amazing patience and long-suffering of God*. The conduct of the "lord of the vineyard" is a vivid representation of God's dealings with man.—It is a faithful picture of His merciful dealings with the Jewish Church. Prophet after prophet was sent to warn Israel of his danger; message after message was repeatedly sent, notwithstanding insults and injuries heaped on the messengers.—It is a no less faithful picture of His gracious treatment of the Gentile Churches. For eighteen hundred years He has suffered their manners: they have repeatedly tried Him by false doctrines, superstitions, and contempt of His word; yet He has repeatedly granted them seasons of refreshing, raised up for them holy ministers and mighty reformers, and not cut them off, notwithstanding all their persecutions. The Churches of Christ have no right to boast: they are debtors to God for innumerable mercies, no less than the Jews were in our Lord's time. They have not been dealt with according to their sins, nor rewarded according to their iniquities.

We should learn to be more thankful for God's mercy. We have probably little idea of the extent of our obligations to it, and of the number of gracious messages which the Lord of the vineyard is constantly sending to our souls. The last day will unfold to our wondering eyes a long list of unacknowledged kindnesses, of which while we lived we took no notice. Mercy we shall find was indeed God's darling attribute: "He delighteth in mercy." (Micah vii. 18.) Mercies before conversion, mercies after conversion, mercies at every step of their journey on earth, will be revealed to the minds of saved saints, and make them ashamed of their own thanklessness. Sparing mercies, providential mercies, mercies in the way of warnings, mercies in the way of sudden visitations, will all be set forth in order before the minds of lost sinners, and confound them by the exhibition of their own hardness and unbelief. We shall all find that God was often speaking to us when we did not hear, and sending us messages which we did not regard. Few texts will be brought out so prominently at the last day as that of St. Peter: "The Lord is long-suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish." (2 Peter iii. 9.)

In the last place, this parable shows us *the severity of God's judgments when they fall on obstinate sinners*. The punishment of the wicked husbandmen is a vivid representation of God's final dealings with such as go on still in wickedness.—At the time when our Lord spoke this parable, it was a prophetic picture of the approaching ruin of the Jewish Church and nation. The vineyard of the Lord in the land of Israel, was about to be taken from its unfaithful tenants; Jerusalem was to be destroyed; the temple was to be burned: the Jews were to be scattered over the earth.—At the present time, it may be feared, it is a mournful picture of things yet to come on the Gentile Churches in the latter days. The judgments of God will yet fall on unbelieving Christians, as they fell on unbelieving Jews. The solemn warning of St. Paul to the Romans will yet receive an accomplishment: "If thou continuest not in God's goodness, thou also shalt be cut off." (Rom. xi. 22.)

We must never flatter ourselves that God cannot be angry. He is indeed a God of infinite grace and compassion; but it is also written, that He is "a consuming fire." (Heb. xii. 29.) His Spirit will not always strive with men. (Gen. vi. 3.) There will be a day when His patience will come to an end, and when He will arise to judge terribly the earth. Happy will they be who are found hid in the ark in the day of the Lord's anger! Of all wrath, none can be conceived so awful as "the wrath of the Lamb." The man on whom the "stone cut out without hands" falls at His second coming, will indeed be crushed to powder. (Dan. ii. 34, 35.)

Do we know these things, and do we live up to our knowledge? The chief priests and elders, we are told, "perceived that this parable was spoken against them." But they were too proud to repent, and too hardened to turn from their sins. Let us beware of doing likewise.

NOTES. LUKE XX. 9–19.

10.—[*Speak to...people...parable.*] Let it be noted, that our Lord addresses this parable to all the people who were listening to His teaching, and not to the priests and elders only.

The parable itself is a remarkable combination of figure, history, and prophecy. Cyril calls it "the history of Israel in a compendium." The parable of the sower, the parable of the mustard seed, and the parable of the wicked husbandmen, are the only parables which are three times recorded in the Gospels.

[*A vineyard.*] This expression is one which we find used parabolically in Isaiah: "The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel." (Isa. v. 7, &c.) Here it seems to mean the land of Judæa, and the peculiar privileges of the Jewish nation.

[*Husbandmen.*] These are the Jewish people and their rulers and priests.

[*Went into a far country.*] This expression must not be pressed too closely. It signifies that as the lord of the vineyard left his vineyard to the occupation of the tenants, so God left the privileges of the Jews to be turned to good account by the nation.

10, 11, 12.—[*A servant.*] In all these three verses the "servants" sent signify the prophets and others whom God sent to call the Jews to repentance, and rouse them to a sense of their

privileges and responsibilities. The treatment the prophets received from the Jews is figured by the beating and wounding of the servants.

13.—[*My beloved Son.*] This part of the parable admits of only one interpretation. The Lord Jesus speaks of Himself and the treatment which He was on the point of receiving at the hands of the priests and elders. He knew that while He spoke they were already plotting His death, and saying “Let us kill him.”

16.—[*He shall come and destroy.*] Here the parable passes into prophecy. Our Lord predicts the destruction of Jerusalem, the scattering of the Jews, and the calling of the Gentiles to enjoy their privileges.

[*They said, God forbid.*] These words would be rendered more literally “may it not be.” The word “God,” is not in the Greek. The exclamation appears to me to show clearly that those who heard this parable saw the application of it.

17.—[*The stone*] This means Christ. Though rejected by those who called themselves leaders and builders in the Jewish Church, it was prophesied that He would become the head of the corner. And as it was foretold, so it would be. (Psa. cxviii. 22.)

18.—[*Whosoever shall fall, &c.*] The meaning of this verse has perplexed some commentators. The distinction between the first and last parts of it has been thought a difficulty. Some have thought that the end of the verse refers to the taking of Jerusalem by the Romans. I venture to think that a better solution of the difficulty can be found.

“Whosoever shall fall upon this stone,” signifies everyone who stumbles at Christ and His Gospel, and refuses to believe in Him as his Saviour, during the present dispensation. Such an one shall be “broken,” ruined, lost, and cast away.

“On whomsoever it shall fall,” signifies everyone who shall be found unbelieving when Christ comes again the second time in glory. Such an one shall be “ground to powder,” and visited with the heaviest displeasure of God. The guilt of unbelief at the end of the Gospel dispensation shall be far greater than the guilt of unbelief at the beginning.

Barradius says, that Augustine takes this view, and refers the verse to the two advents of Christ. The ruin of the unbeliever at the first advent shall be miserable; but the ruin of the unbeliever at the second advent shall be even more miserable still.

Gerhard says, that Chrysostom, Theophylact, and Euthymius, all take the same view with regard to the stone grinding to powder him on whom it falls. They apply it to Christ’s coming to judgment at the last day.

Some see in the verse a distinction between the punishment of the Jewish Church for its unbelief at Christ’s first advent, and the punishment of the Gentile Churches at Christ’s second advent. The Jewish Church stumbled and was “broken,” but shall yet be raised again, and restored to God’s favour at the latter day. The Gentile Churches, when God’s judgment shall fall upon them at last, shall never be restored. Their ruin shall be complete and irretrievable: they shall be “ground to powder.”