

Luke 20:9-19

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CW 402

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## Good Fruit for God

✦ **Refused by senseless sin (vv.9-15)**

✦ **Infused with amazing grace (vv.15-19)**

In the name of Jesus, God's beloved Son, dear fellow tenants of God's vineyard:

This is one Bible story I do not understand. To put this into terms of family as Jesus does is almost too heart wrenching. Some of you remember when my son Joel had his appendix out. I tried to explain how we had unknowingly prayed for him at church on Thursday while praying for people having operations. Do you remember what happened? I choked up and could not say the prayer of thanks. Finally, I said, "Our Father..." and the congregation finished with the Lord's Prayer. It's almost impossible to feel the depth of the heavenly Father's anguish in Jesus' parable, unless you've lost a child. But even then, the way this happens is too horrendous. Stranger still, people sometimes hear this parable and think God is cruel. And I must confess, at first I thought this text was all law – the bad news about our sin. Fact is, the Gospel in this text is like a pomegranate. You have to taste a lot of seeds before you get to the tart, juicy fruit. God's ways truly are strange and mysterious. But God alone can grow **Good Fruit for God**, despite the fact that His goodness is constantly...

✦ **Refused by senseless sin (vv.9-15)**

In just a couple weeks we will sing our glad Hosannas while the children carry palm branches into church on Palm Sunday. That will be the start of Holy Week when Jesus rode into Jerusalem like a triumphant, yet humble King. Crowds streamed out of the city and throngs came over the ridge with Him from Bethany. Everyone was praising Him except the Jewish religious leaders and, of course, the Roman soldiers. As long as His followers didn't get out of hand, the Romans were fine. But the Jewish leaders were jealous. Even Pilate saw that. On Monday, Jesus used a whip to drive merchants out of the temple. When He comes into the temple on Holy Week Tuesday, the Jews demand, "**Tell us by what authority you are doing these things. Who gave you this authority?**" (Luke 20:2) They launch their verbal attacks.

Maybe you remember Jesus' classic defense: "**I will also ask you a question. Tell me, John's baptism – was it from heaven, or from men?**" They realized Jesus had them either way. To answer, "From God," meant Jesus could ask, "Then why didn't you believe John the Baptist?" Answer, "From men," and the people would stone them for blasphemy because the people did believe John was God's prophet. They could only answer, "We don't know." So Jesus stripped their weapons with, "**Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.**" (20:1-8)

Actually, Jesus had told them many times, but they refused to listen. Now Jesus goes on offense. He's about to demolish all their defenses by talking about *Whose Son is the Christ? The Resurrection and Marriage* and *Paying Taxes to Caesar*. First He comes at them with an earthly story that has a heavenly meaning. Do you think Jesus can turn His enemies into allies? He keeps trying.

At first, the story makes sense. If you drive any direction from the Twin Cities, you'll find farm fields leased by the owner to a farmer or corporation. The man with the land expects to be paid something from the crops off his land. Fair is fair. But what if you sent one of your guys to collect the rent and saw him come back empty handed, all beaten and bloody? "What happened to you?" you ask. "Look at me, Boss! This is what they did to me. I got nothing." You call the police, right?

This is where Jesus' story gets strange. His landowner sends another servant who's treated even worse. Why would the tenants assault and humiliate him? What sense does it make that they torture and traumatize the third servant? Matthew and Mark report the landowner sent many other servants who were beaten and killed. Wouldn't the tenants expect some kind of retaliation? Instead, they see the man's son

coming and conclude: *“This is the heir. Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours. So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.”* How insane to think you’ll get the inheritance after all that!

Later we hear that *“the teachers of the law and the chief priests...knew [Jesus] had spoken this parable against them.”* God had been sending one prophet after another since Moses in order for His dear Israelites to bear **Good Fruit for God**. He wanted them to do good works out of gratitude for all His blessings – the promised land, food, clothing, shelter, military victory, miracles one after another, but most of all for His perfect laws and loving promise of a Messiah-Savior to come. Instead, they killed all God’s prophets as if they could keep the promised land as their inheritance without God.

Would you or I do such things? Maybe not murder, but we’ve certainly neglected God’s Word again and again. Think of some time when you really felt down in the dumps. Maybe your friends were downright mean. Or everybody keeps ripping on you. You feel as if you have no friends, so you do the right thing. You go to your room, close the door and pray to God. He’s your best Friend. He always wants to hear from you. And you don’t do all the talking when you pray. You open your Bible and let God speak to you in His Word. Soon His precious promises remind you that God is always with you to comfort, guide and bless you. He will never forsake you. But what happens when you start feeling better? You forget God. Even if you’re in a good habit of going to church, it can happen. I find that when my trouble is past, my prayers and my listening are not as intense. It’s as if I want the vineyard without the Owner. Creation without the Creator. In my heart too, I confess, **Good Fruit for God is Refused by senseless sin**. My heart is constantly cold. It never makes sense. But God’s warning is...

#### ✦ **Infused with amazing grace (vv.15-19)**

*Then the owner of the vineyard said, “What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.”* Is that logical? No, it’s **amazing grace**. He just won’t give up. He keeps sending one servant after another just as God kept sending prophet after prophet and still keeps sending pastors and teachers of God’s Word. We live in an age when Jesus predicted, *“The love of most will grow cold.”* (Matthew 24:12) We owe God unending thanks and praise every day for all the blessings He gives us hour after hour. But we get distracted and forget to pray. Still God keeps the sun shining, warm clothes on our backs, gas firing the furnace and gasoline our cars. We still have more food than any other nation on earth, more than enough for ourselves. Even better, every time you open your Bible you see God’s **amazing grace** reminding you that His Son Jesus really did die for you. He really did wash away every sin with His blood. His Holy Spirit really does make you clean on the inside with His sacraments of Baptism and Lord’s Supper. No, they don’t satisfy feeble sense. But God does not lie. He says your sins are forgiven; they are forgiven. Like a fertilized tree you are **Infused with amazing grace**. It’s God’s spade around the roots when Jesus warns that the owner finally comes to kill the evil tenants.

Jesus is like an odd shaped stone from an ancient building site. Authorities did not like what He said any more than proud, self-righteous intellectuals want to listen to Him today. But God placed Jesus at the corner of His whole creation. Everything depends on Jesus. In fact, the Bible says He upholds everything with His powerful Word. (Hebrews 1:3) Everyone will be judged by how they react to God’s Son. He is the Stone of judgment. Trip over Him, and you get *“broken to pieces.”* But have Him fall on you, and you *“will be crushed.”* God’s **amazing grace** is on His time clock, ticking down to eternity.

God produces His own good fruit. He planted His vineyard and gives us opportunity to work it. Much of the produce is meant for us tenants to enjoy. But should not the Owner have a return too? Left to ourselves, we fall into stubborn, **senseless sin**. But God’s **amazing grace** just won’t quit. It goes above and beyond our best hopes, dreams and imagination. **“Infused”** is a delicious word to describe succulent delicacies like chocolate covered cherries. **Infused** describes God planting His love in our hearts as He loves His Son Jesus. Trust in Him, and you are **Good Fruit for God**.

My son Joel did not ignore the warning pains. He researched appendicitis and called the doctor. Call on Christ today and you will find Him eager to help and to heal. **Amazing grace!** Amen.