

Luke: 20:9–19

From Catena Aurea:

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.

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 him away empty.

11. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty.

12. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out.

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.

14. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be our's.

15. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them?

16. He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid.

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?

18. Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.

AUGUSTINE. (de con. Ev. l. ii. c. 70.) Matthew has omitted for brevity's sake what Luke has not, namely, that the parable was spoken not to the rulers only who asked concerning His authority, but also to the people.

AMBROSE. Now many derive different meanings from the name vineyard, but Esaias clearly relates the vineyard of the Lord of Sabaoth to be the house of Israel. (Isa. 5.) This vineyard who else but God planted?

THEOPHYLACT. Or each one of the people is the vineyard, each likewise is the husbandman, for every one of us takes care of himself. Having committed then the vineyard to the husbandmen, he went away, that is, he left them to the guidance of their own judgment. Hence it follows, And went into a far country for a long time.

AMBROSE. Not that our Lord journeys from place to place, seeing that He is ever present in every place, but that He is more present to those who love Him, while He removes Himself from those who regard Him not. But He was absent for a long time, lest His coming to require His fruit might seem too early. For the more indulgent it is, it renders obstinacy the less excusable.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. Or God took Himself away from the vineyard for the course of many years, for since the time that He was seen to descend in the likeness of fire upon Mount Sinai, He no longer vouchsafed to them His visible presence; though no change took place, in which He sent not His prophets and righteous men to give warning thereof; as it follows, And at the time of the vintage he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard. (Exod. 19.)

THEOPHYLACT. He says of the fruit of the vineyard, because not the whole fruit, but part only, He wished to receive. For what does God gain from us, but His own knowledge, which is also our profit.

AMBROSE. And it came to pass that He ordained many others, whom the Jews sent back to him disgraced and empty, for they could reap nothing from them; as it follows, And again he sent another servant.

THEOPHYLACT. After the prophets then had suffered all these things, the Son is delegated; for it follows, Then said the Lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? That the Lord of the vineyard speaks doubtingly, arises not from ignorance, for what is there that the Lord knows not? but He is said to hesitate, that the free will of man may be preserved.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. The Lord of the vineyard also ponders what He should do, not that He is in need of ministers, but that having thoroughly tried every device of human aid, yet His people being in no wise healed, He may add something greater; as He goes on to say, I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him.

THEOPHYLACT. Now He said this, not as ignorant that they would treat Him worse than they did the prophets, but because the Son ought to be revered by them. But if they should still be rebellious and slay Him, this would crown their iniquity. Lest therefore any should say that the Divine Presence has necessarily been the cause of their disobedience, He uses purposely this doubtful mode of speech.

AMBROSE. When then the only-begotten Son was sent to them, the unbelieving Jews, wishing to be rid of the Heir, put Him to death by crucifying Him, and rejected Him by denying Him. Christ is the Heir and the Testator likewise. The Heir, because He survives His own death; and of the testament which He Himself bequeathed, He reaps as it were the hereditary profits in our advances.

THEOPHYLACT. Since we have already assumed the people, not Jerusalem, to be the vineyard, it may perhaps be more properly said that the people indeed slew Him without the vineyard; that is, our Lord suffered without the hands of the people, because in truth the people did not with their own hands inflict death upon Him, but delivered Him up to Pilate and the Gentiles. But some by the vineyard have understood the Scripture, which not believing they slew the Lord. And so without the vineyard, that is, without Scripture, our Lord is said to have suffered.

CHRYSOSTOM. Now it was not accidentally but part of the purpose of the divine dispensation that Christ came after the prophets. For God does not pursue all things at once, but accommodates Himself to mankind through His great mercy; for if they despised His Son coming after His servants, much less would they have heard Him before. For they who listened not to the inferior commands, how would they have heard the greater?

AMBROSE. He rightly puts a question to them, that they may condemn themselves by their own words, as it follows, What then will the Lord of the vineyard do to them?

BASIL. And this happens as it were to men who are condemned, having nothing to answer to the plain evidence of justice. But it is the property of Divine mercy not to inflict punishment in secret, but to foretell it with threatenings, that so it might recall men to repentance; and thus it follows here, He shall come and destroy those husbandmen.

AMBROSE. He says, the Lord of the vineyard will come, because in the Son is present also the Father's majesty; or because in the last times He will be more graciously present by His Spirit in the hearts of men.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. The Jewish rulers were shut out then, because they resisted their Lord's will, and made the vineyard barren which was entrusted to them. But the cultivation of the vineyard was given to

the Priests of the New Testament, upon which the Scribes and Pharisees, as soon as they perceived the force of the parable, refuse to permit it, saying as follows, God forbid. They did not however escape any whit the more, because of their obstinacy and disobedience to the faith of Christ.

THEOPHYLACT. Now Matthew seems to relate the parable differently; that when our Saviour asked indeed, What will he do then to the husbandmen? the Jews answered, he will miserably destroy them. But there is no difference between the two circumstances. The Jews at first pronounced that opinion, then perceiving the point of the parable said, God forbid, as Luke here relates.

AUGUSTINE. (de con. Ev. lib. iv. cap. 70.) Or else, in the multitude of which we are speaking there were those who craftily asked our Lord by what authority He acted; there were those also who not craftily, but faithfully, cried aloud, Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord. And so there would be some who would say, He will miserably destroy those husbandmen, and let out his vineyard to others. Which are rightly said to have been the words of our Lord Himself, either on account of their truth, or because of the unity of the members with the head; while there would be others also who would say to those who made this answer, God forbid, inasmuch as they understood the parable was spoken against themselves. It follows, 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?

THEOPHYLACT. For the rulers of the people rejected Him, when they said, This man is not of God. (John 9:16.) But He was so useful and so precious, that He was placed as the head stone of the corner.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. But holy Scripture compares to a corner the meeting together of the two nations, the Jew and the Gentile, into one faith. (1 Pet. 2:7. Eph. 2:20.) For the Saviour has compacted both peoples into one new man, reconciling them in one body to the Father. Of saving help then is that stone to the corner made by it, but to the Jews who resist this spiritual union, it bringeth destruction.

THEOPHYLACT. He mentions two condemnations or destructions of them, one indeed of their souls, which they suffered being offended in Christ. And He touches this when He says, Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be shaken to pieces. But the other of their captivity and extermination, which the Stone that was despised by them brought upon them. And He points to this when He says, But upon whomsoever it shall fall, it shall grind him to powder, or winnow him. For so were the Jews winnowed through the whole world, as the straw from the threshing floor. And mark the order of things; for first comes the wickedness committed against Him, then follows the just vengeance of God.

AMBROSE. The vineyard is also our type. For the husbandman is the Almighty Father, the vine is Christ, but we are the branches. (John 15:5.) Rightly are the people of Christ called a vine, either because it carries on its front the sign of the cross, or because its fruits are gathered in the latter time of the year, or because to all men, as to the equal rows of vines, poor as well as rich, servants as well as masters, there is an equal allotment in the Church without distinction of persons. And as the vine is married to the trees, so is the body to the soul. Loving this vineyard, the husbandman is wont to dig it and prune it, lest it grow too luxuriant in the shade of its foliage, and check by unfruitful boastfulness of words the ripening of its natural character. Here must be the vintage of the whole world, for here is the vineyard of the whole world.

20:19–20

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.

20. And they watched him, and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA. It became indeed the rulers of the Jews, perceiving that the parable was spoken of them, to depart from evil, having been thus as it were warned concerning the future. But little mindful of this, they rather gather a fresh occasion for their crimes. The commandment of the Law restrained them not, which says, The innocent and righteous men thou shalt not slay, (Exod. 23:7.) but the fear of the people checked their wicked purpose. For they set the fear of man before the reverence of God. The reason of this purpose is given, for they perceived that he spoke this parable against them.

From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:

20:9–15 The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard

The Vineyard is the House of Israel Leased to the Jews.

Ambrose: Very many derive various meanings from the word vineyard, but Isaiah clearly stated that the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel. Who else but God founded this vineyard? He leased it and set out to foreign places. The Lord, who is always everywhere, does not journey from place to place,

but he is present to those who love him and absent from those who neglect him. He was absent for many seasons, fearing that the foreclosure might seem premature. The more indulgent the generosity, the more inexcusable is the stubbornness.... He thus leased to the Jews his fortified, prepared and beautified vineyard. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 9.23–24.

God Goes Abroad for a Long Time.

Cyril of Alexandria: The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the man of Judah, a plant new and beloved. He who planted the vineyard is God, who also went away for a long time. God still fills everything and in no way whatsoever is absent from anything that exists. How, therefore, did the Lord of the vineyard go away for a long time? After they saw him in the shape of fire at his descent on Mount Sinai with Moses, who spoke the law to them as the mediator, he did not again grant to them his presence in a visible way. To use a metaphor taken from human affairs, his relation to them was like one who made a long journey abroad. Commentary on Luke, Homily 134.

God Sent Prophets.

Cyril of Alexandria: He went away, but plainly he cared for his farm and kept it in his mind. He sent faithful servants to them at three different times to receive produce or fruit from the tillers of the vineyard. There was no period in the interval, during which there were not sent by God prophets and righteous men to admonish Israel and urge it to bring forth as fruits the glories of a life in accordance with the law. They still were wicked, disobedient and callous, and their heart was hardened against admonition so that they would in no way listen to the word that would have profited them.... Israel was guilty of the charge of apostasy and of idol worship. This is how they shamefully threw out those who were sent to them. Commentary on Luke, Homily 134.

The Foolishness of Killing the Heir.

Cyril of Alexandria: The lord of the vineyard thinks to himself saying, "What shall I do?" We must carefully examine in what sense he says this. Does the householder use these words because he had no more servants? He certainly did not lack other ministers of his holy will. When a physician may say of a sick man, "What shall I do?" we should understand him to mean that every resource of medical skill had been tried without success. We affirm that the lord of the vineyard, having practiced all gentleness and care with his farm but without benefiting it in any way, says, "What shall I do?" What is the result? He advances to still

greater purposes. "I will send," he says, "my son, the beloved one. Perhaps they will reverence him." Observe in this, that after the servants, he sends the Son as One not numbered among the servants but as a true Son and therefore the Lord. Although he put on the form of a servant for the dispensation's sake, he was God, very Son of God the Father who possessed natural dominion. Did they honor him who was sent as Son and Lord and as One who possesses by inheritance whatever belongs to God the Father? No, they murdered him outside the vineyard, having plotted among themselves a foolish and ignorant plan full of all wickedness. They say, "Let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours." Commentary on Luke, Homily 134.

20:16–18 The Interpretation

Jesus Takes the Inheritance from Israel and Gives It to Gentiles.

Ephrem the Syrian: He proposed another parable. "A certain man, a householder, planted his vineyard." This is like what the psalmist said, "You brought a vine out of Egypt, you drove out the nations and planted it." He protected it with a hedge, the law, and prepared a pit in it for the winepresses, the altar, and built a tower there, the temple, and sent his servants to bring him its fruit. The first, the next and the last were not received. Then he sent his Son. He was not the last, for although he appeared at the end, he already existed. John witnessed, "A man will come after me, who is before me." He did not do this because he was unaware that the ancestors were incapable of receiving the produce but to remove the detractions of these stubborn ones from their midst. They were saying that he was not able to direct and prepare everything that he wanted to by the law, so therefore he sent his Son to impose silence on them. When they saw his Son coming, they said, "Here is the heir of the vineyard. Come! Let us kill him, and the inheritance of the vineyard will be ours." They killed him, but their inheritance was taken away from them and given to the Gentiles. It happened just as he had said, "For to him who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance; but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away." Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 16.19.

The Vineyard Given to the Holy Apostles.

Cyril of Alexandria: The farm was given to other farmers. Who are they? I answer the company of the holy apostles, the preachers of the evangelical commandments, the ministers of the new covenant. They were the teachers of a spiritual service, and knew how to instruct people correctly and blamelessly and to lead

them most excellently to everything that is pleasing to God.... The God of all plainly reveals that the farm was given to other farmers and not only to the holy apostles but also to those who come after them, although they are not from Jewish blood. He says by the voice of Isaiah to the church of the Gentiles and to the remnant of Israel, "Aliens shall stand and feed your flocks, foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers." Many were called from the Gentiles, and holy people from their number became teachers and instructors. Even to this day, people of Gentile race hold high place in the churches. They are sowing the seeds of piety to Christ in the hearts of believers and making the nations entrusted to their care into beautiful vineyards in the sight of God. Commentary on Luke, Homily 134.

The Church, the Father, Christ.

Ambrose: The vineyard prefigures us, because the people of God, founded on the root of the eternal Vine, appear above the earth, bordering the lowly ground. They now grow ripe with budding flowers. They now are clothed with dense greenery and take on a gentle yoke when they worship with mature branches as if with the twigs of the vine. The Father Almighty truly is the Vinedresser, and Christ is the Vine. We, not vine sprouts, are pruned by the sickle of the eternal cultivator if we do not bear fruit in Christ. The people of Christ then is correctly named a vineyard, either because the sign of the cross is woven on its forehead or its fruit is gathered in the last season of the year. It may also be called a vineyard because there is equal measurement in the church of God for rich and poor, humble and powerful, servants and masters. There is no difference in the church, as in all the rows of the vineyard. As the vine clings to trees, so the body is joined to the soul and the soul to the body. When the vine clings, it is raised up. When it is pruned, it is not diminished, but it increases. The people of God is stripped when it is bound, uplifted when it is humbled, crowned when it is cut back. The tender shoot cut from an old tree is grafted onto the progeny of another root. When the scars of the old shoot are cut away, the people of God likewise grow into the wood of the cross. It is as if they are cherished in the arms of a pious parent. The Holy Spirit comes as if cast down into the deep ditches of the earth and poured into this prison of the body. With the flow of saving water, the Holy Spirit washes away whatever is filthy and raises the posture of our members to heavenly discipline. Exposition of the Gospel of Luke 9.30.

The Religious Leaders Understood.

Cyril of Alexandria: What did the scribes and Pharisees say when they heard the parable? Their words were, "Heaven forbid!" One may see by this that having understood its more profound significance, they

put away from them the impending suffering and were afraid of the coming danger. They however did not escape, because they could not be restrained from disobedience, nor would they submit to believe in Christ. Commentary on Luke, Homily 134.

Jesus is the Stone Rejected by the Builders.

Ephrem the Syrian: He led them to the point of judging themselves, saying, "What do the vinedressers deserve?" They made a pronouncement concerning themselves, saying, "Let him destroy the evil ones with evil." He then explained this, saying, "Have you not read that the stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner?" What stone is this? It is the one known to be as hard as lead. See, he has said, "I am setting a plumb line in the midst of the sons of Israel." To show that he himself was this stone, he said concerning it, "Whoever knocks against that stone will be broken to pieces, but it will crush and destroy whomsoever it falls upon." The leaders of the people were gathered together against him and wanted his downfall because his teaching did not please them. He said, "It will crush and destroy whomsoever it falls upon," because he got rid of idolatry along with other such things. "The stone that struck the image has become a great mountain, and the whole earth has been filled with it." Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron 16.20.

Jesus Joins Two People Together.

Cyril of Alexandria: Although he was a chosen stone, those who had the duty to build up the synagogue of the Jews in everything that was edifying rejected the Savior. He still became the head of the corner. Now the sacred Scripture compares with a corner the gathering together or joining of the two people. I mean Israel and the Gentiles in the sameness of sentiment and faith. The Savior has built the two people into one new person by making peace and reconciling the two in one body to the Father. This resembles a corner, which unites two walls and binds them together. Blessed David wondered at this corner or gathering together of the two people into one. He said, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This [the corner] has been done by the Lord, and is marvelous in our eyes." Christ has bound together the two people in the bonds of love and in the same sentiment and faith. Commentary on Luke, Homily 134.

20:19 The Application

The Religious Leaders Fear the People.

Cyril of Alexandria: Again the gang of Pharisees is inflamed with unbridled rage. They draw the bow of their envy. They grind their teeth at him who calls them to life. They savagely attack him who seeks to save and who humbled himself from his supreme and godlike glory to our condition. They plot the death of he who became man that he might abolish death. The wise Evangelist shows us the only cause that hindered their shameless pride. He said that they feared the people. He understood, therefore, that they were not restrained by a feeling of piety toward God. The commandment given by Moses that plainly says, "You shall not kill the holy and the just," did not bridle their violence. They had far more respect for the fear of people than the reverence due to God. Commentary on Luke, Homily 135.