

5) Human Rejection is Crushed by Divine Exaltation

Luke 20:9-19 • 2022-04-03 • Lent series "Crushed"



Company mergers and take-overs are common. Sometimes it is a friendly merger in which one board of directors aims to take over another company and it is agreed upon. But other times the takeover is hostile. That happens when one company decides it wants to takeover and purchase another company against the wishes of its board of directors. This is what happened in 2004 when one of the largest brewing companies, InBev decided to takeover Anheuser-Busch. Anheuser-Busch and InBev tossed many lawsuits at each other. They fought for control. They destroyed the reputation of many company leaders. In the end InBev used their money and financial power and they won. The board of directors at Anheuser-Busch was eventually fired, and the merger went forward. It was a hostile takeover. The same type of thing can happen within a company. I'm sure many are aware of the history of Steve Jobs who was forced to leave the company which he himself had started. The company leaders forced its founder to leave the company. Might someone ever try a hostile take-over of God's kingdom? It sounds ridiculous but it has been attempted many times. How does our God respond when someone rejects his authority and tries to take over his Church? It's something which Jesus warns against in Luke 20. Today we'll see how human rejection is crushed by divine exaltation.

Jesus was speaking on the Tuesday before he would be arrested and put to death on the cross. He "was teaching the people in the temple courts and proclaiming the good news." The crowds of people were listening to his teaching with great attention. But this caught the attention of the spiritual leaders of the people. And they came to Jesus trying to catch him in his words. They were trying to find an excuse to remove him, arrest him, and even kill him. Jesus knew they were planning a hostile takeover and to kill him. So, he shared a parable with them about what can happen to hostile takeovers when they are directed at the ultimate authority, against God.

"A man planted a vineyard, rented it to some farmers and went away for a long time. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants so they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. He sent another servant, but that one also they beat and treated shamefully and sent away empty-handed. He sent still a third, and they wounded him and threw him out."

Luke reveals that the spiritual leaders knew exactly what Jesus meant by this parable. Prophets like Isaiah had called the people of Israel God's vineyard. However, the spiritual leaders of the past, the very people put in charge of God's Church, had acted like the wicked farmers in Jesus' parable. God sent them his prophets. But what had the kings, the priests, and the elders of the people done? They chased after the true prophets. God would send them faithful messengers and they would toss them out. Prophets like Elijah and Elisha were opposed by kings of Israel. Faithful messengers like Amos were sent to Israel but were shut out and told to go back in disgrace. Prophets like Jeremiah were tossed out of the palace in Jerusalem and into the pits. And the ungodly leaders of ancient Israel killed the prophets again and again.

And the opposition and killing didn't end with the prophets. Jesus' parable goes on to describe the hostile take-over plotted against him by the spiritual leaders of his day. *"Then the owner of the vineyard said, 'What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.'* *"But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. 'This is the heir,' they said. 'Let's kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him"* Even as Jesus spoke this parable plans were already in motion to arrest Jesus and kill him in only a few days. The spiritual leaders would force Jesus out of Jerusalem to die. And he knew it!

Don't think that the attempts to take-over God's Church ended there either. The same leaders who killed Jesus sought to arrest and kill the apostles and evangelists in the early Church. The biggest threat the early Christian Church faced wasn't from outside forces. It was from those trying to take-over control from within by the spiritual leaders. God sent messengers like John Wycliffe who spoke against the spiritual leaders of the Roman church. A hundred years before the time of Luther he asserted that the claims of the papacy were against the Bible, that monasticism was corrupt, and that there were immoral priests in the church. He taught correctly there is a Holy Christian Church that exists even outside and apart from the visible Roman church. After Wycliffe died of natural causes, the leaders of the Roman church declared him a heretic and all his works were publicly burned. Another man, a Bohemian Roman Catholic priest named John Huss, lived a hundred years before Luther. He also spoke against the false teachings of the leaders of the church. The spiritual leaders of the day put him in prison, and then burned him alive. As Huss was being killed by fire, he was heard singing Psalms out loud. He was just another messenger rejected by the spiritual leaders. Huss had predicted that another voice would come that would not be suppressed. Just over a hundred years after his death Luther sparked the Reformation. The authorities in the church did all they could to silence him too.

Do you see the pattern? Jesus' parable outlines what types of take-over attempts are consistently found within the church. People in positions of leadership have tried to silence any voice that comes faithfully sharing the Word of

Christ. They did it to the prophets of ancient Israel, they did it to the Christ, and they still wage war against Christ's faithful messengers today.

Jesus spoke this parable to the crowd. He shared it as a warning for them and for us. Human rejection of the gospel will happen. There are churches today that have spiritual leaders in their pulpits and professors in their seminaries who are taking the scepter from Christ and placing it in their own hands. They claim authority over the Word of God and distort and silence his Word. They will tell you that sin is not sin and that grace is not grace. By their lies they will deceive many. It may be portrayed as if they are merely protecting the church. But they are in truth opposed to the gospel of Christ and attempting a hostile take-over.

But should this pattern surprise us? There may also be times when we ourselves attempt to take-over the throne and reject the Word of our God. Don't think that the spiritual leaders are the only ones who need to heed this warning. Jesus spoke to the crowd because he also knows what condition of our hearts by nature. There is a constant desire in every sinful heart to rebel against the Word of God and to reject it. When we hear a faithful message or a messenger from God our natural response is to reject it. Church leaders, elders, and church boards in our church body have slandered and abused gospel ministers and abused for faithfully sharing God's Word. Why? It is the hostile take-over by sinful hearts which rebel against Christ and his Word. What about your life? Is the pattern of a hostile take-over there? In what ways do you and I need to take Jesus' warning to heart?

Jesus warns that all those who reject God's Word and his messengers will not succeed. *"What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others."* This is exactly what happened to those leaders who rejected Jesus. They lost their position. The city of Jerusalem ended up destroyed. The temple was lost. He put an end to the Sanhedrin's power. He flattened the Pharisees. He crushed the scribes and the high priest. They faced the judgment of a holy God who does not tolerate any who reject the Word of his Son. And God gave their position to others who would listen.

We see that God truly does have a solution for every hostile take-over attempt of his Church. He crushes all who reject him. *When the people heard this, they said, "God forbid!" Jesus looked directly at them and asked, "Then what is the meaning of that which is written: " 'The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone'? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed."*

If we despise and reject God's Word, his Word will not fail. We will. If a congregation has a faithful pastor who is called by God to preach repentance from sexual immorality, and that church decides to cut off that pastor from their church, guess who wins? In the end Christ wins. If we decide there is a part of the Word of God that we don't like and we assume authority over Scripture, we won't win. Christ wins. And we will come crashing down against the Word.

Jesus spoke of the prophecy of the Psalm 118 which everyone understood referred to the Messiah, the Christ. He is the stone which the builders, the spiritual leaders of Israel, had rejected. But he has become the capstone. They might try to kill him, but Jesus would crush them with the message "Christ is risen!" He broke the bonds of death and rose to victory. He is seated at his heavenly throne in full authority and power. It is his Church. No one can take it away. The scepter will not depart from his hands. You cannot take it away. You cannot stop his Word. You cannot reject his Word and still stand. If you have any sin which you stubbornly refuse to bring before the throne of mercy and refuse to repent, you will be crushed by the cross and by the empty tomb. The Christ is exalted. We dare not think for a moment we can exalt ourselves over him and his Word.

Don't be crushed, be built into his kingdom and on him! Jesus has become the cornerstone on which his Church is built. It is not just some company that the devil can purchase, or which the devil's servants can overcome. His kingdom is not built on a trivial stone which we can reject. But it is founded in strength and in mercy. In his great mercy he builds his Church despite all the human rejection. Can you see the great merciful love of God as he sent prophet after prophet to his people? Can you see the abounding love as the Father did what no other would ever consider doing? He sent his Son to a hostile world. Can you fathom the greatness of his patience as he continued throughout history to send faithful messengers of his gospel despite the constant human rejection? Can you see his love for you in your own life after all the times you exalted yourself over his Word, but he still sent it to you?

That great patience and love met its fullest height when the rulers rejected their Ruler and he hung on the cross. Jesus knew it was coming. Yet he still came. And while he hung on the cross and the rulers sneered at him they tried to wrestle control of his kingdom. But he was laying the foundation stone. By his death on the cross we have the gospel foundation. We know the love of God for his kingdom, his vineyard. He builds his Church with the blood of his own son. His risen and living Son remains forever the head of the church, bringing forgiven hearts into his kingdom.

How does our God respond when someone rejects his Word and tries a hostile take-over of his Church? He responds with grace. With patience. And with powerful judgment he crushes all who stand against his Son. And he exalts his Son, and exalts with him all who are built on him alone.