

Upside-Down Kingdom (13): I Will Send My Son

(Luke 20:9-19)

I. Introduction

- A. Alfred Roberts was a slave in central Texas when he was emancipated in 1865
1. He had been owned by a rancher named Abe Roberts, so he took that name
 - a. He would raise cotton and 13 children on a farm near Austin, Texas
 - b. One of those children, Amanda Roberts Jones, is still alive at age 109
 - 1) Think about it—her life spans the Wright Brothers and moon landing
 - 2) She picked cotton for a week to pay the poll tax to vote for FDR
 2. On October 27, this daughter of a former slave voted for Barak Obama
 - a. Mrs. Jones spans era when black men were owned and elected president
 - b. Her daddy likely never dreamed of such a day as a slave on Roberts farm
- B. There was a day that Jews who heard Jesus never thought would ever come
1. No, that wasn't the coming of their Messiah, as we saw last week
 - a. Messianic expectation was high in the first century; Jews longed for it
 - b. They were so ready that they tried to force Jesus to be king ([John 6:15](#))
 2. What they never dreamed of was **Gentiles** being included in that kingdom
 - a. Jews saw Gentiles as unclean; Jews were chosen, so Gentiles were not
 - b. Remember Peter's first words when later sent to Cornelius ([Acts 10:28](#))
 - c. Rabbis Hillel & Shammai debated if commerce with Gentiles was allowed
 - 1) **Old joke:** "Why did God make Gentiles?" Someone has to pay retail!
 - 2) In reality, many thought God made Gentiles for one reason—fuel!
 - d. The rabbis taught the mind of all Gentiles is always intent upon idolatry
 - e. It was subject of debate if it were possible for Gentiles to be righteous
 3. This led to a distorted view of Jewish identity—for example, [John 8:32](#)
 - a. Jesus says, "You will know the truth ..." **What their response?** ([8:33](#))
We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone...
 - b. Truth was, they'd been slaves to every major (and minor) world power!
 - c. They saw themselves as God's only people... and they got it all wrong
 4. If you see yourself as God's exclusive beloved people, you get it wrong

- C. In **Luke 20**, Jewish leaders get it wrong when they confront Jesus (**20:1-2**)
1. That sounds like a legitimate question, doesn't it? *We'd ask that, right?*
 - a. If someone came here and started preaching, we'd want to know why!
 - 1) But this isn't really a legitimate question—they'd seen his authority
 - 2) The very way he taught was like one with authority (**Matt 7:29**)
 - b. They'd run into Jesus many times; they'd seen miracles many times
 - 1) They ask, "*What miraculous sign then will you do?*" (**John 6:30**)
 - 2) That was right **after** He fed 5000 with kid's lunch! *What do you want?*
 2. Not really looking for authority, and He answers with a question (**20:3-4**)
 - a. They are in a dilemma—they don't accept John but the people seem to
 - b. So they refuse to answer... and Jesus refuses to answer their question
 3. But he does answer them— in our parable today (**Reading: Luke 20:9-16**)

II. I Will Send My Son: The Parable

- A. Parable is of wealthy landowner who rents out his vineyard to tenant farmers
1. Jesus audience would have recognized the vineyard as Israel itself.
 - a. The image is very similar to Isaiah's "*Song of the Vineyard*" in **Isaiah 5**
 - 1) God plants a vineyard, He clears it of stones and cares for it
 - 2) He looks for good grapes at harvest, but he finds only bad ones
 - b. Isaiah is very clear as to the identity of the vineyard (**Isa 5:7**)
 - c. This same metaphor is used in **Psa 80:8**, **Jer 2:21** and other passages
 - d. Hearers of the parable would have recognized that this was about Israel
 2. Point of the story is what happens when it comes time for the harvest
 - a. Way it works is that the tenants give part of the harvest to the owner
 - 1) These tenants simply ignore the owner (*try that with IRS this year*)
 - 2) He sends messengers to tenants, but they are beaten and driven away.
 - b. Talmud- tenants sometime laid claim to ownership of land (*Morris, 311*)
 - 1) What if owner of property or his family isn't heard from for awhile?
 - 2) Well, possession is 9/10^{ths} of the law, and this owner was far away
 - 3) If the cat's away, the mice try to take the vineyard for themselves
 - c. The tenants here are in full rebellion against the owner of vineyard

- B. So what's the owner supposed to do if his messengers are mistreated?
1. In **2 Sam 10**, David sent messengers to Hanun, the new king of Ammon
 - a. He accused them of spying; cut off half beards/clothes, sent them back
 - b. In humiliating the messengers, Ammonites showed contempt for David
 - c. So how did David respond? *He cut off all their beards... heads and all!*
 2. That's how you'd expect a wealthy landowner to act to such disrespect
 - a. Call the lawyers. Raise a posse. Shoot first, ask questions later
 - b. But Jesus gives us a glimpse of God's upside-down kingdom (**Lk 20:13**)
 - 1) Surely this was a misunderstanding, and they'll listen to beloved son
 - 2) But they kill the son (heir) so as to claim the property for their own.
- C. Jesus asks, "*What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them?*" (**20:15**)
1. Jesus answers his question, "*Kill them and give the vineyard to others*"
 - a. That is a fairly obvious response to what amounts to a slave uprising.
 - b. But Jesus is interrupted, "*May this never be!*" ("*Heaven forbid!*" NRSV)
 - 1) Same response to, "*Shall we go on sinning that grace...*" (**Rom 6:2**)
 - 2) Why do they break in here with such a strong objection to story
 2. They get Jesus' point—"the others" here can only refer to the Gentiles
 - a. The kingdom will be taken from the Jews and given to Gentiles
 - b. That gets a gasp from crowd and (*later*) a conspiracy from his critics
 - c. The idea God would turn kingdom over to Gentiles was unthinkable
 - 1) Like slave owner Abe Roberts imagining a black man as president
 - 2) Like slave Alfred Roberts imaging his daughter helping to elect him
 - d. *God saving Gentiles?* Very idea was preposterous, if not blasphemous!
 3. But Jews hadn't followed God and they were rejecting His Son (**20:17-18**)
 - a. They rejected the capstone, most important stone in the building of God
 - 1) Old legend about the Temple nearing completion—capstone missing
 - 2) It was sent and discarded—now found as the most important stone
 - b. Paul (**Eph 2:20**) and Peter (**1 Pt 2:7**) use this of Jesus as the foundation
 - c. Jesus changes the metaphor— it's a stone that crushes all who fall on it
 4. Rather than being warned, Jesus' critics become conspirators (**Lk 20:19**)

III. Conclusion

- A. **First**, Jesus is blunt about who He is... and that we must accept Him
1. In parable, Jesus is not a respected rabbi or rabble-rousing revolutionary
 - a. He is the beloved (and rejected) son sent from the father.
 - b. He is the capstone who breaks into pieces those who reject him.
 2. Remember, the Jewish leaders had asked for authority— He is authority!
 - a. What he says and does is tied to who He is—the Messiah and Son
 - b. Those who reject the authority of Jesus reject the authority of God!
- B. **Second**, Jesus is also blunt about what was about to happen to Him
1. Jewish leaders begin to conspire against Jesus at the end of our text
 - a. But Jesus had predicted their conspiracy way back in **Luke 9:44**
 - b. In Mark, the first plotting to kill Jesus is mentioned in **Mark 3:6!**
 2. In **Luke 19**, Jesus said he had come to seek and save the lost (**19:10**)
 3. But to save the lost, He must die as the sacrifice that takes away sin
- C. **Third**, Jesus is blunt about the Jewish leaders missing God's kingdom
1. These religious leaders seen as paragons of what it meant to be Jewish
 - a. “*Teachers of the law*” (“*scribes*”) were scholars, experts in religion
 - b. “*Chief Priests*” were high priest's family, social & political leaders
 2. They saw themselves as keepers of the true covenant and worship of God
 - a. They were the only faithful ones, the only saved one, the one true church
 - b. They were the ones who had the truth. *Does any of this sound familiar?*
 - c. Yet they rejected Messiah and would be broken to pieces by the capstone
 3. Why were Jewish leaders so sure they were right? *Did all the right things*
 - a. They had right truth. Right worship. Right identity. Right organization
 - b. Because they were so sure they were right, their hearts were not open
 - 1) Remember what Jesus said earlier about their hearts (**Luke 16:15**)
 - 2) They had the right religious externals... and missed heart of God
 - c. May we never put such emphasis on externals and miss what's at center
- D. Are we living as children of the heavens seeking the heart of God?