

**INTRO:**

Alright friends, come on back... **(START RECORDING)** ...Really great to be back with you. I was sharing with my Missional Family this week that one of the joys of being invited to teach for other church families is...how much it causes me to miss YOU/MY church family. So, really is good to be back with you...Recently, I've been slowly working my way through a book called "*Gentle and Lowly*" by Dane Ortlund/would DEFINITELY recommend it. And as it turns out, it's become, for me, a great compliment to these parables of Jesus we're studying each week. Because in it Ortlund says this/**listen**: "*It takes a lot of sermons and a lot suffering to believe that God's deepest heart is merciful, gracious and slow to anger. The Fall in Genesis 3 not only sent us into condemnation and exile; (it) also entrenched in our minds dark thoughts of God. Thoughts that are ONLY dug out over multiple exposures to the Gospel over many years.*" ... THAT, is in-part, WHY we're in our "**Upside Down**" series! BECAUSE, as we've seen, these parables are windows into WHO God is THAT if you have, as Jesus keeps saying, "*eyes to see and ears to hear,*" will correct ANY of those dark thoughts you have about God... TODAY, you get a BOGO/2-for-1 deal - because if ya look real quickly at **v.33**, ya see that Jesus intentionally links 2 parables into 1 when he says, "*Hear another parable.*" 2 parables He gives to make 1 point. And THIS time not just a point about who GOD is, but ALSO, WHO we are. That's why I've titled this message: **Spiritual EKG**, because these 2 parables are gonna show you what's actually going on in your heart and under the surface of your life, in HOPES OF helping you live more healthy and whole... So let's follow along as we hear Jesus's Parables of: **The Two Sons & The Tenants**: **(PAUSE RECORDING)** **Joanna** reads...

**TEXT:**<sup>1</sup>

Hey, can we give a BIG thank you to BOTH **Joanna** AND God for the reading of His Word?... **(START RECORDING)** ...So given that Jesus connects these two parables, we're gonna go back-n-forth with em and IN going back-n-forth, you're gonna see **4 Things ABOUT The Condition Of Your Heart: One, Your Problem; Two, A Couple Counterfeit Solutions We Offer In Attempt To Deal With That Problem; Three, A Real Solution; And Four, Power For Implementing That Solution!** ...So **First, Our Problem**: Now, I want you to look at the second parable first; specifically, **v.33**, where you see we got this master with a vineyard that he's leased to some tenants while he's off outta the country. So this is an investor, who's bought this piece of land and equipped it to produce. You see he's put up a wall to keep predators out, a tower to oversee the production of everything, and of course a winepress with which to take grapes and make wine. So he's bought the land, developed the land, and NOW turned the land over to some tenant-farmers, whose job it is, you see in **v.34**, to live-on BUT work the land - essentially pay this OWNER rent. That's why these individuals are called "*tenants.*" They get the benefit of living-on and enjoying the property; the owner gets the benefit of passive income FROM the property. Here's the problem though: The tenants refuse to pay rent! Actually, every time the owner sends one of his associates to collect, they attack and even kill said associates. **Why?** BECAUSE they're effectively claiming the land as their own! These tenant-farmers/

<sup>1</sup> A large portion of this message adapted from various thoughts and insights provided by "21. Dear Jesus, Just Leave Us Alone (Parables #21)" - <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/larkcast/id1339351918?i=1000536129572> + "PROSTITUTES BEFORE YOU - The 'Amens' of Jesus; The Challenge of the Cross" - March 11, 2001 - Matthew 21:28-39 - Tim Keller + "The Tenants and the Vineyard" // Matthew 21 33-46 // Listen #5" - J.D. Greear

though they're tenants, wanna be OWNERS! Don't want to have to answer to anyone. THEY wanna be in-control...And Tim Keller points this out, but what's interesting is that the vineyard motif was a pretty common framework in the OT for explaining Israel's relationship to God. For example, in **Deuteronomy 6**, after God has brought Israel out of Egypt and is on the cusp of leading them into the Promised Land, He says this: *"When the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers....with great and good cities that you DID NOT build, and houses full of all good things that you DID NOT fill, cisterns that you DID NOT dig, VINEYARDS...you did not plant...take care not to forget the LORD, who brought you out of Egypt."* **What's that saying?** Same thing JESUS is illustrating here: Which is as human beings, we are and always have been...tenants! Not owners! Tenants! Just as Israel couldn't take any credit for having become a people, with an identity, home, material blessings/it was all from God/by His grace...neither can WE take credit for our lives!

Earlier this week I attended a meeting hosted by what's called Send Relief. It's our denominational arm for meeting the tangible needs of our city IN Jesus' name. One of the reasons why we as a church are unequivocally Baptist and financially give to our denomination/ BECAUSE we have great vehicles LIKE Send Relief. I've actually been asked to serve on the Board OF our Send Relief Center here in Boston, so pray for me on that. But this particular meeting was on how christians, churches, even secular organizations from around the city can come together to support those impacted by the war in Ukraine. And we heard unbelievably moving stories FROM the front-lines. One lady in particular. Beautiful, young Ukrainian mother of a 2 year old, only spoke Russian, so through a translator, shared what the last 21 days or so have been like since she had to pack up her entire life into one suitcase and migrate here to Boston! Heartbreaking. And as she was sharing, I just started praying, *"God forgive me! Forgive me! I like to think I'm a hard worker and have made something of my life. But the factis: The only difference between me and this Ukrainian woman is simply YOUR grace: that you allowed me to be born in the US, in this time in history, into the family in which I was born, with the opportunities I was given. Forgive me for EVER thinking I earned or OWN any of that!"*...Deep down, if you're honest, you too KNOW you're not the owner of your life. You're a tenant. I mean how many blessings/comforts do you enjoy that are a function of things entirely outside your control/things like time, space, history, genetics...ALL determined by God's grace...Not to mention, no matter how hard we try not tom we're all still aging right? So not only is much of our life a product of sheer grace, but our VERY lives are ULTIMATELY out of our control. And in one sense that's depressing, but in another it's God's gracious reminder that everything we have is borrowed. The fragility of life serves to remind us that we're NOT owners!...Love the way **1 Timothy 6:7** says it: *"for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world."* Beginning to end, our lives are gift/grace!

But see, that's **our problem**: We hate that don't we? Cuz of course, GRACE takes control out of your hands. **Think about it**: If God gives and sustains your life by grace/certainly if He saves you by grace alone then THAT MEANS - and I know I'm talking to freedom-loving Americans here - you and I have no inherent rights, in the sense that we're not the owners of our lives. We're tenants, meaning GOD can ask anything of us. Like if you're saved and sustained by being a

good person, becoming the best version of yourself, following the rules/even the religious ones, then when God asks something of you/maybe to obey or trust Him in some way, take some risk, or just give up a dream or desire you've had for a long time, you can say, "No!" right? Certainly if you feel you've been good/obeyed God, you can say, "No God! You owe ME!" But see, if God saves and sustains you by grace/He's the owner and you're a tenant, then there's no limit to what He can ask of you/your life's not yours to control...And we hate that! THAT'S *our problem!*

Which brings us to **A Couple Counterfeit Solutions We Offer In Attempt To KEEP Control:** *First*, look at what the tenants do. Albeit in a very exaggerated/violent way, they offer up what you might call the normal *secular* solution. Which is to say, every time they're met with, you could say, "a reminder" that they're just tenants/one of the owner's associates comes to em, they seek to in some way discredit and even "kill off" that reminder right? "*Beatings, stonings, thieving, even killing.*" ALL of which, I think, is Jesus showing us that: Regardless of the form it takes, that's the normal *secular* response to God/the Gospel/Christianity's claim that we're not our own and are created to know and worship God. We seek to discredit/even kill it right? Sometimes by trying to discredit the MESSAGE itself - raising what Tim Keller calls "defeater beliefs," which are things that if true would lead us to believe Christianity's false - like that Christianity's oppressive, or anti-science, or intolerant. Sometimes we go after the MESSAGE... Other times though, and like these tenants here, we go after the MESSENGER. We look at churches or other Christians and say, "*See? They're so hypocritical. I can't believe in what they believe in*" As Ghandi famously said, "*I like your Christ, but I don't like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ.*" Just these kind of *counterfeit secular solutions* intended to discredit the notion that we're ultimately "tenants"...But it's not only secular; we've got *SPIRITUAL counterfeit solutions* too! Cuz look back up in the first parable: ***What's the only difference Jesus gives between those two sons?*** It's their responses right? One son, you could say, the rebellious, maybe more prodigal one, says, "*No! I ain't working*" Blatantly disobeys his dad BUT ultimately changes his mind. While the OTHER, maybe the more moral/straight-edged one says, "*Sure. I'll get right on it,*" but then never does. The only difference in these two sons is there ultimate response to the Father! And Jesus says, "*it's the first son*" even WITH all his rebellion and hesitation, who ultimately "*did the will of his father.*" ***Cuz what's He trying to say?*** He's trying to say, that a lot of us/maybe ESPECIALLY those of us in the church hate not being in control. And so what do we do? We act like that second son, which is to say we put on an obedient, religious, SPIRITUAL face. Cuz of course religion can be a very effective way of avoiding God's authority in your life. You wanna maintain control/don't wanna be a tenant under God's ownership, well then, come up with a scheme to pay Him off. It's spiritual, but like it's secular counterpart, it's counterfeit! And I say, "counterfeit," cuz notice, Jesus says, even though both are trying to maintain control of their lives, both end up losing control! The tenants, He says, end up being "*put to a miserable death,*" which of course is a reference to hell as the destiny for those who refuse grace and persist in living as their own authority; while the second son is so far from the kingdom that "*tax collectors and prostitutes*" get in before him! Which to be clear, is NOT Jesus affirming the extortion practices of NT tax collectors OR the immorality of prostitutes. It's Jesus saying, "*even those with TERRIBLE spiritual records and who KNOW*

*they're resisting grace get in before those hiding behind their record/thinking they DON'T need grace." **Both are counterfeit!***

Which brings us, then, to the only **Real Solution**...which is...**To change your mind!** Change your mind. Cuz notice, the only character in these two parables who gets any kind of commendation from Jesus is the first son! And certainly not cuz he's perfect or does everything right, but because, **v.29**, he changes his mind! That's it! If you wanted to use AA terminology, you'd say, "he had a moment of clarity." In Biblical terms he, "repented!" Literally, turned from one belief - in this case that your life is yours and maybe you share some of it with Jesus - TO... No, your life is Jesus' and as a tenant, HE allows you to enjoy it! **A change of mind toward surrender!** According to Jesus, that's the only thing that matters!

My former pastor used to describe it saying that, God wants us to offer our lives to Him as "blank checks."<sup>2</sup> Cuz when you give someone a blank check, you sign your name at the bottom, pre-approving whatever amount they write in later right? Now, I'll be honest, that experience has always been unnerving for me, cuz what if that person takes that check and empties out my account and flees the country/granted emptying out my account is gonna get em to like Somerville, but you get the point...And YET, that's essentially what Jesus asks of us: That in being tenants we give our lives to Him like a blank check/put our "yes" on the table before He even asks the question...And I know what some of you are thinking: (VALLEY GIRL) "*what's a check? Is that something from history class?*" So let me tweak the analogy: Venmo! With Venmo you can transfer money from your account to another account, and no matter the amount/big or small, you know what you're on the hook for and so you're always in control right?...God doesn't want a Venmo relationship with you. Instead, as Owner, He asks for your bank username and password, so that HE can take out WHAT He wants WHEN He wants. As J.D. Greear says, "*the only terms Jesus accepts are surrender. He doesn't want your 'gifts, efforts or record' - be that church attendance, moral purity, giving, or even missionary activity. He wants YOU*"/for YOU to be under HIS ownership, by learning to trust Him in every area of your life. According to Jesus, that's the only **real solution!**...But again, incredibly unnerving...

So **Finally**, where then do we find the **Power** to actually **Implement That Solution** and surrender? Well, look at each of the MAIN sons in these two parables, cuz they each tell us something very important. Notice first, that first son in the initial parable: Jesus tells us that his gut-response, right, is to say, "no" to His father. But THEN after consideration, he changes his mind/he repents...he surrenders?...You know what that's telling you? It's telling you: Jesus understands your doubts and hesitations about surrendering to Him! He's not sitting there going, "*boy, if you have doubts/if you got hesitations about following me or trusting me in some area of your life...you're screwed!*" No! Not only is Jesus more than capable of handling your doubts and hesitations, but think about the Gospel/**what does it say?** It says, your doubts; your hesitations; EVEN your outright rejection of Jesus...it's ALL been paid for at the Cross!...You understand, Jesus' death on the Cross was done IN and BECAUSE OF rejection. So as odd as it

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<sup>2</sup> Illustration and explanation adapted from: <https://outreachmagazine.com/features/discipleship/53483-god-is-not-looking-for-a-venmo-relationship-with-you.html>

might sound, Jesus isn't concerned with your doubts, hesitations or even rejection. He's CONCERNED that you don't/like that second son, carry your rejection to the end! Again, that's the real difference between the sons in that first parable. They BOTH reject the Father. One overtly-so; the other religiously-so. But only one carries their rejection to the end. The other changes his mind before it's too late! **You see?** Jesus understands your doubts and hesitations. And YOU understanding THAT can actually help soften those doubts and hesitations, BECAUSE you begin to see that Jesus is one to whom you can entrust yourself!

But then **Finally**, look at the son in the SECOND parable/the one sent by the owner to the tenants and who's ultimately robbed and killed! The theologian Helmut Thielicke said that, it's at THIS the point where Jesus stretches the parable to the breaking point so that it almost becomes improbable. Cuz where would you ever find an owner, who instead of putting his foot down and enforcing the law with tenants, would instead keep on sending more messengers and especially his son, knowing the threat. It's just kind of unbelievable, because this is not how you do business or get your property back right?...UNLESS this owner isn't primarily a businessman/ primarily concerned about property. What if INSTEAD, this owner is primarily concerned about relationship with his tenants, such that he's willing to show staggering mercy by sending repeated invitations and warnings until FINALLY sending his own son, whom he HOPES will causes these tenants to see just how willing he is to reconcile with em. If THAT'S instead what he's doing, well then, we're talking about a whole different kind of owner. We're talking about someone more like...God!...And if you look at **v.42**, you see: that's EXACTLY who Jesus is talking about: using this WHOLE parable to illustrate how God the Father/through the OT prophets sent repeated invitations and warnings to trust, obey and live under His authority. But each time, God's people/US rejected those prophets and continued to live under the illusion of their own "ownership." And so finally, God says, *"Enough!...NOW, I'm gonna reveal a staggering mercy the likes of which the world has never seen. And EVEN THOUGH I know full well what the world is going to do to Him/how they'll beat, and stone, and rob and ultimately kill Him, I'm nevertheless gonna send my very own Son/the "cornerstone"/Jesus Christ to provide full and final reconciliation."* So that NOW/no matter who you are/what doubts and hesitations you have, you get a choice: As Jesus says in **v.44**, you can choose to get tripped up and fall over Jesus, because you persist in trying to live as owner rather than tenant of your life; the result of which will be that you're ultimately *"broken to pieces,"* both as you miss out on the Kingdom AND because none of us have the ability to carry the full weight of our lives right?...OR you can choose to change your mind and instead have the cornerstone *"fall on and crush you,"* which is to say, let your heart be crushed by the staggering mercy of a God, who isn't some businessman primarily concerned with his property, but a loving Father primarily concerned with YOU/ wanting relationship with YOU...You see THAT/you take THAT in, and what it does is cause you to realize that God is not just one to whom YOU can entrust yourself; He's one whose ultimately entrusted HIMSELF...to YOU...which actually begins to give you the power to change your mind and return trust Him for every area of life, no matter how unnerving that might be at first...**Let Him be the owner of your life! Let's Pray...Amen!**