

## **“Living on Borrowed Time”**

Luke 20:9-19

*Series: Kingdom Come Week 9. Submit to the Owner*

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In her lifetime, Agatha Christie wrote more books than any person on the planet. The Mistress of the mystery novel was married to an archeologist. Agatha Christie said, “All women should be married to an archeologist because the older she gets, the more he is interested in her.” Toward the end of her life, Agatha Christie made this observation:

I live now on borrowed time, waiting in the anteroom for the summons that will inevitably come. And then - I go on to the next thing, whatever it is. One doesn't luckily have to bother about that.

What is ‘Borrowed Time’? One definition puts it this way:

A period of uncertainty during which the inevitable consequences of a current situation are postponed or avoided.

When a husband and wife lead separate disconnected lives, their marriage is living on borrowed time. When there is a merger or a lay-off coming, employees know they are living on borrowed time. When the doctors say there is nothing more they can do, it's time for hospice, it's the beginning of living on borrowed time. When the number of cases of Covid start rising around us, when those we know come down with it, we feel we might get it. It's only a matter of time...borrowed time. Truth is we are all living on borrowed time. We are all in the waiting room. We all know, eventually, our number or name will be called. And then – we will go on to the next thing. Yet here I think Agatha Christie is wrong. It is essential that we think about what comes next.

If we are living on “borrowed” time, from whom did we borrow it? God. Psalm 139:16 says, “All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” We do not own our lives. We borrow our time from God. And whenever you borrow something, you have to give it back. Sometimes there is a penalty to pay. Joel Schelsinger borrowed a book called The Joy of Camping from the Orchard Park Public Library in 1981. I'm sure there was no joy when he discovered he still had the book 24 years later. By now, Joel was living in another state. Yet he was determined to do the right thing. He drove 400 miles back to his old hometown, returned the book and paid the fine. The maximum penalty for overdo or lost books was \$15. Joel wasn't satisfied with that. Aware the local library faced a budget crunch, he calculated what the fine would be at 10 cents a day for 24 years and wrote out a check for \$2,190.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus asks this question: “What can a person give in exchange for one's life?” (Mark 8:37). The answer is: nothing. There is no overdue fine you can pay when the time

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<sup>1</sup> "Uh, I Found This in My Attic," The Christian Science Monitor (5-20-05).

comes to return the life you borrowed from God. So what does the Lord want us to do with the life He lends us? Jesus tells us in our ninth Kingdom parable:

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. Luke 20:9-10

Much of the farmland in Galilee was owned by foreign landlords. So it was common for the owner to lease the land to tenant farmers who agreed to pay their rent with a certain percent of produce from the land. When harvest time arrives, the distant owner sends a servant to collect the pre-arranged rent. That's when the trouble starts.

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 20:10-12

Talk about a terrible job assignment. It's a bill collector's nightmare. "All right Johnson, it's your turn to get the rent from the Grim Reapers. Oh, and Johnson, before you go make sure your life insurance is paid up and your will is in order." Why did the owner keep sending his servants to be beaten?

This is not just any vineyard and any landowner. When Jesus speaks of a vineyard he really means the nation of Israel. The Landowner is the Lord. In the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah writes:

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard: My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. The vineyard of the LORD Almighty is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are the garden of his delight. Isaiah 5:1-2, 7

Who are the servants on this suicide mission? The prophets of the Old Testament right down to John the Baptist. Each one came with the same message for God's people: Turn back to the Lord. Give God the fruit of your labor. Worship Him alone and throw away your idols. Be fair and just in your business, care for one another. But what do the people do with every prophet God sends? They beat some, stone some and kill the rest. The leaders of God's people refuse to acknowledge God's ownership of their land and their lives. They attack anyone who says otherwise. So the Landowner has one last option.

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. Luke 20:13-14

When the wicked tenants see the son of the owner arrive, they quickly hatch a plot. They conclude the owner must have died and now the heir is coming to collect his property. If they kill him, then the land will have no owner. It will become theirs. As the young man

enters the walls of the vineyard, the tenants cordially welcome him. At first they listen to him. Then they savagely fall upon him, tie him up, drag his body outside the walls of the vineyard and murder him.

But the tenants make one crucial mistake. The Owner is not dead. Jesus concludes his story with a question to the audience.

“What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When the people heard this, they said, “God forbid!” The teachers of the law and the chief priests looked for a way to arrest him immediately, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people. Luke 20:15-16, 19

Why does Jesus tell this story? He is living on borrowed time. The Son of God has just entered the walled vineyard called Jerusalem. The crowds cheer and welcome Him at first. But by the end of the week, in the dark of night, the leaders send troops to fall upon Him. They tie Him and try Him and take Him outside the vineyard walls to crucify Him. They know Jesus is accusing them. But instead of repenting and turning to Him, they do the very thing their ancestors did to the prophets, the very thing He warned them not to do: they kill God’s messenger and take control of God’s vineyard. What they do not know is Jesus’ other prediction will also come true: in less than 40 years, Jerusalem will come to a wretched end. They do not know they are living on borrowed time.

God, the Owner, asks, “What are you doing with the life you borrowed from Me?” Years ago in a Men’s Group the question came up: What will be written on your tombstone? Several of us confessed before we came to know Jesus as Lord and Savior, the message was selfish. “Driven” or “Workaholic” would be chiseled on a few blocks. Several stones would boast of our achievements and acquisitions. Then someone asked, “What would your wife write on your tombstone?” No one dared answer that one. Yet we all know that’s who will probably write it. But once Jesus became Lord, the words on the grave marker change. Now we want our graves to say: a good husband, father, Christian.

Whether you admit it or not, God is the owner of your life. The world will tell you your life is yours to do with as you will. Jesus says our life is a loan, we don’t own it. The first question is: will you give your life to Jesus and acknowledge Him as the owner? You and I must follow the directions of the owner because He will ask for it back. You and I can say Jesus is the Lord of all my life, but the reality is right now He may only possess part of it. He may have your Sunday morning, but what about Monday through Saturday? He may have your heart but what about your eyes or your hands? He may have your home but not your career. He may have your soul but not your mind and body. He may have you when you’re in public, but what about when no one is watching? I know Jesus does not have all of me. But when they asked, “What do you want on your tombstone?” God gave me the words John the Baptist said about Jesus, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). I want Jesus to own more and more of me.

How do you do that? Follow the directions He gives in His Kingdom parables. All through the series we've been studying these stories to find out how to live as citizens of the Kingdom of heaven while we live here on earth. So ask yourself these questions:

1. Do I Surrender All like the woman who poured her perfume on Jesus' feet?
2. Do I Sow Big: sharing the Good News about Jesus even when I face frustrations and don't see much fruit?
3. Do I Stop and Help like the Good Samaritan who went out of his way and risked his life for a stranger stranded on the side of the road of life?
4. Do I Share My Stuff instead of foolishly keeping it to myself like the Rich Fool?
5. Do I Serve the Outsider: helping people find their way back home to the joyous feast of Jesus instead of making excuses and keeping silent?
6. Do I See the Need and help the Lazarus in my life? Or do I just pass by?
7. Do I Stick with It and keep praying like the Widow facing the Judge? Do I cry out for those who are denied justice and fair treatment?
8. Do I Sell and Get rid of the idols which block my relationship with God. Am I a loaded camel trying to shimmy through the eye of a needle?

These are the ways we submit to the Owner of our lives. These are the fruit the Owner wants from us.

This parable also relates to the vineyard God loans to you. Your vineyard is the area where you have influence: your school friends, your team, your work place, your neighborhood, this community, your family. These are also on loan to you. What fruit are you producing for God? Are you practicing kindness, humility, gentleness, forgiveness? Are you sharing the Word and inviting family and friends to find their way back to Jesus? Are you honest, fair and just? Do you stand up and speak up for those who are denied their rights, equality, fairness? Are you sharing your resources with the poor, oppressed, hurting, hungry, homeless, hopeless? What fruit do you give to the Owner of your life?

I am in awe of the fruit which came from Woodside this week. Sue Harris-Miller and Michelle Thompkins asked you to provide 144 new winter coats for the Millhill Child and Parent Development Center in Trenton. You gave 188 new coats! Joe Cain and our Ignite Senior Highs asked you to fill 50 boxes with food to make it possible for families to enjoy Thanksgiving Dinner. You provided 70 boxes! Danielle Holsey and Holland Baseball contributed 27 of those boxes. Two thirds were delivered to families in Trenton living in temporary housing while another third were delivered by our youth to the Lower Bucks YMCA in Fairless Hills. Sue Rushing and Kim Palmieri asked their neighbors in the River Glen Neighborhood to donate to the Penn Del Food Pantry. They received 636 lbs. of food and \$220.

What if we could go to the next level of sharing and caring? What if we could provide more than a meal and a warm coat for the holidays? What if we could give a home for Christmas? Starting next week, November 29 – the first Sunday of Advent - we will kick off our special offering called “Home for Christmas.” Through this challenge we will support the construction of a Habitat for Humanity house in Bristol and the repair of the leaking roof and worn out Heating and AC system over the home of our Children’s Ministries and Woodside Christian Preschool. Our goal is to raise \$50,000. Half will go to the house and the other half to the roof project. If you give your offering in honor of someone as a Christmas gift, his or her name will be written on a 2x4 in the new house.

When we recognize Jesus is the Owner of our lives and we follow His will, we see miracles happen. Chantell Socha and Stephanie Hermesmeier and our Children’s Ministry asked you to fill 100 Operation Christmas Child Shoe boxes. You achieved this goal of sending Toys and the Good News around the world. But it doesn’t stop there. This challenge inspired Ava LaSasso to ask her dance studio, BC Discoveries Dance & Theater Arts Company in Newtown to participate. Ava feels there are always opportunities to make an impact when groups of people are together and she has found that helping others has helped her stay positive during this time of such instability. She set a goal of sending 100 Operation Christmas Child boxes around the world from her dance studio and that is what they did! Many families and staff from the studio had never heard of Operation Christmas Child before! That’s what Ava and all the others are doing with the time God has given them on this earth.

What are you doing with your time?