

## Undeclared by the Enemies of the Cross

Luke 13:31-35 (NIV)

<sup>31</sup> At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." <sup>32</sup> He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' <sup>33</sup> In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem! <sup>34</sup> "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. <sup>35</sup> Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Jesus is teaching as he is on his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He answered, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to." (Luke 13:22-24) He goes on to explain that it's not simply knowing who Jesus is or hearing the individual syllables of his words; it's believing in the one God had sent to them, the only one who is the way and the truth and the life. He is the narrow door – not the path for you to walk on, but he himself is the path, the narrow door, his life and his actions are the only way to be with God.

Imagine listening to that sermon, that message, and then responding to it by saying, "Hey Jesus, I think you should leave." That's basically what the Pharisees did. At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." (verse 31) It was said under the guise of care and concern for Jesus, but truly they showed themselves as enemies of the cross.

When you first hear the phrase "enemies of the cross," you maybe think more of what Jesus said a couple of verses later about Jerusalem who kills the prophets and stones to death those sent to them. Or you think of what the priests and prophets did to Jeremiah by shouting for his execution as he was preaching the judgment that God was about to destroy Jerusalem unless they repented of their sins. Enemies of the cross are the people who hurt and kill followers of Christ, right?

Enemies of the cross are a bit different than those who blatantly persecute and try to kill Christians. Paul describes them as those whose god is their stomach. (Philippians 3:19) These are people who want a comfortable life, who try to avoid suffering and pain at all costs because they believe there is nothing good to be had for anyone to go through suffering or pain. Thus, avoiding pain, a cross, should be a powerful motivator to get someone to do what you want them to do.

That's why the Pharisees appealed to Jesus to leave. "You don't want to suffer, Jesus. You don't want to die. Herod wants to kill you. You should probably just pack up and head to another place, another place that's not here." They didn't hit Jesus or pick up stones to stone him... not this time. An enemy of the cross is anti-cross, one who wants Jesus and others to avoid the cross.

For the Pharisees, this isn't surprising. They were the "separate ones," as their name means. They thought that they had elevated themselves closer to God by all the extra things they had done, not what they suffered. They wanted a Messiah who approved of their hard work. So, Jesus, instead of believing in you, how about you take care of yourself and leave and go somewhere else. We don't need you or want you to be the narrow door. We just need you to affirm what we believe, to validate the path that we are walking. In this way, these enemies of the cross refused to be gathered to Jesus as they wanted Jesus to avoid the cross.

Are we enemies of the cross? Preposterous! We love Jesus! We are here because we want to be with him! We believe that it was through the cross that we are saved, our sins are taken away. And you're right. But have we ever said to Jesus, "You know, now's not a great time. Maybe you should leave."? Maybe we've implied it when we encounter a teaching from the Bible that rubs us the wrong way, that doesn't seem like God would actually want this for us because I don't want this for me, it's hard and causes pain. And so we compartmentalize that teaching, put it in a mental box, tape it up, and store it away and not deal with it. That's the part of Jesus I want to leave. I want the other stuff. I want the love and the forgiveness. I want heaven. But what you say about the relationships of men and women in the church and in the world... what you say about who should partake in your Supper... what you say about babies being sinful... what you say about how long it took you to create the earth... what you say about how sex is reserved between one man and one woman in marriage... I'm going to store that away; I don't want those parts of you or your Word because they are hard. Maybe you could send them somewhere else so that I don't have to deal with them.

We say we love Jesus and want Jesus, but then the cross comes, the things that cause us pain and suffering. Your cross might be one of those teachings that you wrestle with – and you are not alone in that wrestle. These teachings are hard and are often counter-

cultural, that we live in a world that promotes the exact opposite as being what is good and right and moral. Your cross might be another person, someone who drives you crazy, yet they're a part of this church, a part of the body of Christ, and you want to get rid of them and maybe you even go so far as to tell them to leave, like how the Pharisees told Jesus, that you would frame it in terms of selflessness, that you're really looking out for them when really you just want them to leave.

Enemies of the cross want pain and suffering to go away. They don't want to endure; they want to avoid it. They see no point and no benefit and no reason to go through it. So their mission is to get rid of the crosses, of the things that cause us pain. In doing so, they keep Jesus at an arm's length. They refused to be gathered by a God who is heading to a cross.

We know that the temptation to do whatever is needed to get rid of suffering is a hard one to resist. Pain and suffering may very well cause us to stop gathering together in Jesus' name, that it hurts too much to continue – the teachings, the people, whatever the crosses are. We feel defeated by the cross, the pain and suffering of life.

While we try to avoid crosses and keep Jesus at an arm's length to do so, that doesn't stop his desire to gather us to him. "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing." (verse 34)

But Jesus is not one to mope about, wishing he could do something about the situation, as if he were already defeated. He actually does something about it. When the enemies of the cross try to get Jesus to avoid the cross by telling him that Herod wants to kill him, he replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' In any case, I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!" (verses 32-33)

Jesus is not defeated by the enemies of the cross. And he isn't defeated by us when we hold him at an arm's length and refuse to be gathered by him because we too want to avoid crosses. No, Jesus pressed on. He was determined to see his mission through, a mission that ended with a cross. He faced it head on knowing what he would suffer, that it would be painful beyond words, that he would be killed for it. Yet, he willingly and persistently endured it for the enemies of the cross.

He did this so that we would not always be enemies of the cross, but rather that through the cross we would be gathered to him. Jesus carried all of our sins on his shoulders as he resolutely kept his perfect path to the cross. He allowed them to nail his hands and feet to it so that he could pay that price for us. He went on to pain and suffering and death so that we would be reconciled to God, having our sins paid for and taken away. He was not defeated by the enemies of the cross, deterred from it. Instead, he pushed on to his cross to gather his enemies to himself and his care and his forgiveness. All the times that we pushed Jesus away because following him caused us hurt, we are forgiven. Jesus stands undefeated by the enemies of the cross for their sake, and so do we as he gathers us to himself by the cross.

Knowing that Jesus persisted and went on undefeated by the enemies of the cross, we bring that same persistence as we share the message of the cross, that this is not the pain and suffering that we should avoid, but instead this is the instrument God used to change us from enemies into his children, his chicks gathered to him and his forgiveness and his protection. Instead of keeping these painful teachings compartmentalized and away from us, we wrestle with them. We ask for his help to live them out because we want to be with Jesus, all of Jesus, the crosses included. We persist like Jeremiah in teaching a message that people often don't want to hear. We do this because we know that Jesus stands undefeated by the enemies of the cross and that the Holy Spirit can and does convert them to be his children through the cross Jesus endured.

Instead of avoiding our crosses on our walk with God, we remember that Jesus was and is undefeated by the enemies of the cross. He endured the cross to gather us to himself. He did this even for his enemies. Help us, Lord, to endure our crosses, the things that bring us pain and suffering, knowing that we stand with you undefeated by the enemies of the cross. Amen.