

Undeclared by Flesh & Blood

Luke 20:9-19 (EHV)

⁹ He began to tell the people this parable: "A man planted a vineyard, leased it to some tenant farmers, and went away on a journey for a long time. ¹⁰ When it was the right time, he sent a servant to the tenants to collect his share of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenant farmers beat the servant and sent him away empty-handed. ¹¹ The man went ahead and sent yet another servant, but they also beat him, treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. ¹² He then sent yet a third. They also wounded him and threw him out. ¹³ The owner of the vineyard said, 'What should I do? I will send my son, whom I love. Perhaps they will respect him.' ¹⁴ "But when the tenant farmers saw him, they talked it over with one another. They said, 'This is the heir. Let's kill him, so that the inheritance will be ours.' ¹⁵ They threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. So what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? ¹⁶ He will come and destroy those tenant farmers and give the vineyard to others." When they heard this, they said, "May it never be!" ¹⁷ But he looked at them and said, "Then what about this that is written: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone? ¹⁸ "Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush the one on whom it falls." ¹⁹ That very hour the chief priests and the experts in the law began looking for a way to lay hands on him, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people.

Through our UNDEFEATED sermon series, we've had many enemies already: giant-sized enemies, enemies of comparison or score-keeping, the enemy of the law of sin, the enemy of misery, and the enemies of the cross. The enemies of the cross are the ones who wanted Jesus to avoid the cross, avoid anything that would bring pain, suffering, and death. These enemies are different than the flat out, blatantly evil people who persecute Christians. Those enemies who attack Jesus are the ones he faces off with today, enemies of flesh and blood.

Our reading from Luke 20 is picking up on the Tuesday of Holy Week, the Tuesday before Jesus dies on the cross on Good Friday. He's not oblivious to what his enemies of flesh and blood are planning. They had been plotting how to get rid of him for some time now. Nearly three years ago they tried to toss him off a cliff in Nazareth, his hometown. Jesus foretold what they would do to him this coming Friday, even though the disciples didn't get it. It was on Jesus' mind and heart that people were actively trying to get rid of him even though he was there and pushing forward in his mission to save these very same people.

While the chief priests and the experts in God's law were looking for an opportunity to get rid of Jesus, they tried to undermine his authority and challenged his teachings. Jesus countered their undermining question with a different question that an honest answer from them would reveal their motives, and so they feigned ignorance. This is why Jesus told this specific parable, another story using an earthly setting to teach a divine, spiritual truth.

In this parable, there's a man who planted a vineyard. He leased it to some farmers to take care of it while he went away from a long while. He comes back when it's time to collect his share of the fruit. He sends one servant to gather it, but the hired farmers beat him and send him away empty-handed. The owner sends another servant, and the farmers not only beat that servant but also insult him, treat him shamefully. The owner sends a third servant, and the tenant farmers wound him and send him away.

The situation is escalating. The owner of the vineyard knows that he has to do something drastic to remedy this. So, he decides to send his son, figuring that the son will be more respected than hired servants. But the violence escalated to new heights as the tenant farmers now saw an opportunity to kill the heir and take the vineyard away from the owner. But they didn't consider the response of the father, the owner. Jesus concludes the parable: "So what will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenant farmers and give the vineyard to others." (verses 15-16)

The meaning of the parable was not lost on the listeners. "That very hour the chief priests and the experts in the law began looking for a way to lay hands on him, because they knew he had spoken this parable against them. But they were afraid of the people." (verse 19) The enemies of flesh and blood challenging Jesus did exactly what we would expect. They tried all that much harder to silence Jesus right now, to lay their hands on him, to enact violence upon him, to beat him, kill him, throw him outside of the city. In three days, they would get their wish as they unlawfully arrested, tried, and crucified Jesus.

Do we face the same kind of enemies of flesh and blood? Does someone want to kill you for being a follower of Jesus? Hopefully not! While all of us certainly have God protecting us wherever we are, in the US, thankfully, we also are protected by governmental laws. That doesn't mean that there aren't people who want to silence us for talking about Jesus, for sharing him. Our persecutions come more in the form of those who volley for religion to stay out of the workplace, out of government, and wherever else people

don't want to hear it – basically thrown out of their lives. Or, worse yet, our persecutions come from people ignoring and dismissing us when we want to share Jesus with them, that they can't be bothered to even acknowledge what we're doing.

However, we know that our experiences are not everything happening in the world. Open Doors - an international non-governmental organization advocating on behalf of persecuted Christians - reported in 2021 that on average, every day, 13 Christians are killed for their faith, 12 churches or Christian buildings are attacked, 12 Christians are unjustly arrested, detained or imprisoned, and 5 Christians are abducted for faith-related reasons. So, for last year, that means nearly 5,000 Christians were killed for their faith, over 4,000 church buildings were attacked, another 4,000 Christians were unjustly arrested, and about 2,000 abducted.

Christians still face enemies of flesh and blood today. And we know that answering their violence only adds to sin; it doesn't solve it. So, they continue to persecute, and what can we really do to stop them? This makes us feel defeated by enemies of flesh and blood, that it's just a matter of time until they break us. But are we? What's the outcome of our battle?

Jesus' parable does not have a happy ending for the enemies of flesh and blood. As the people cry out, "May it never be!" to the scenario of the tenant farmers killing the son of the vineyard owner and the vineyard owner coming and destroying them and giving the vineyard to others, Jesus continued. He looked at them and said, "Then what about this that is written: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone? Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush the one on whom it falls." (verses 17-18)

There are many enemies of flesh and blood who want to silence Jesus and make Christians go away. Jesus tells us to expect these persecutions. But he is also announcing here with his quote from Psalm 118 that the enemies of flesh and blood can do their absolute worst, that they can bring all the firepower and all the violence that they can muster, but it won't take down Jesus. No, in fact, the opposite happens. As the enemies of flesh and blood oppose Jesus, they are the ones who are shattered; they are the ones who break.

Jesus is a stone, a rock, that doesn't erode, that doesn't buckle, that can't be pushed aside. Those who oppose Jesus, these enemies of flesh and blood, they will be destroyed as they oppose him, broken to pieces, crushed. They don't succeed. They don't defeat Jesus. They do not win. Even with the violence done to Jesus on Good Friday with the hitting, the scourging, the insulting, he still reached his goal and paid for the sins of the world. The stone they rejected has become the cornerstone, the sure foundation that every believer builds on, the one who took away the sins of the world!

Not only is Jesus not defeated by enemies of flesh and blood, but he continues to send people to these enemies so that they would know him and what he has done for them, just like the owner of the vineyard continued to send out the servants to the tenant farmers. God continues to preserve his Word and raise up messengers to bring this Word to people so that they would stop opposing him and instead build on him, that they would have the solid foundation of who God is and his forgiveness for us, even while others reject him.

God is solid. He always keeps his Word. He is more powerful than anything else in all existence. He cannot be defeated by flesh and blood. We ourselves are proof that Jesus is not broken, that all who oppose Jesus are broken to pieces or crushed. Some of you here today used to call yourselves agnostic, atheist. You were once enemies of flesh and blood wanting to do away with Jesus, oppose him, oppose his Word. Honestly, all of us at one time were enemies of flesh and blood to God, as we were all sinful by nature, sinful from the time we were conceived. But God stayed who he is. Our opposition was broken against him. He changed us. He brought us to faith. He has now become the cornerstone for our lives, the one we build on. With him we have a sure and solid foundation that no person can destroy, no matter how violently they hate our God or us because of our God.

We admit that we can be broken as we are opposed by enemies of flesh and blood. However, we build on Jesus because he is our solid foundation, our cornerstone which was rejected by the builders. His death was not a victory for the enemies of flesh and blood, but instead it is our victory in Jesus' unbreakable forgiveness and his perfect life lived for us. As much as the world has tried to get rid of Jesus, he's still here. He is unbreakable as well as his Word. Jesus stands undefeated by the enemies of flesh and blood.

It is on the unbreakable Jesus that we build. We pray that the enemies of flesh and blood would not just be broken and crushed. We pray that God would continue, as faithful as he is, to reach out to them, to turn them from enemies to pieces of his building along with us, that they would be added to the body of Christ, to the Church. May the enemies of the cross be changed and stand on the once rejected cornerstone of Christ, that they too would stand undefeated by flesh and blood. Amen.