**OUR UNSTOPPABLE GOD**

**(Matthew 21:33-46)**

I want you to imagine yourself in a crowd of people. That may be hard to do in these days of social distancing. I see you. I pull out my phone and use it take a picture of you within that crowd. Then, I email you the picture or text it to you. When you receive the send digital copy of the picture, what is the first thing you would look at it? If you are like most people, you will first look for yourself. You want to know if your hair is sticking up, or if your eyes are closed, or if you have a funny expression on your face. You first want to see yourself in the picture.

Jesus routinely told parables, and these stories He told are snapshots. They are word pictures of spiritual reality. When we read or hear a parable Jesus told, the first thing we do is to look for ourselves in the story. We can usually identify ourselves pretty quickly.

I am afraid, however, that sometimes we fail to learn all that God wants us to get from the parables because we are looking at them in the wrong way or at least we are looking in the wrong direction. There is nothing wrong with looking for ourselves, but we need to look beyond ourselves to what else is there.

Consider for instance the parable of the prodigal son. It is a great story about a father who has two sons. The first son demands his share of the father’s estate. Graciously, the father gives it to him and the son takes his windfall, goes on a journey and blows through his money like there is no tomorrow, but tomorrow does come. Meanwhile, the elder son is dutiful. He stays home, works in the family business, and lives responsibly.

In time, the younger son returns home with his tail tucked between his legs. He’s been humbled and is remorseful, but his father welcomes him with open arms and throws a party. While the party is going on, the older son comes in from a long, hard day of work. When he learns that his younger brother has returned and that his dad is throwing him a party, he is in no partying mood. While everyone else parties, he pouts. “Look at all I have done for Dad, and he’s never thrown me a party!”

We can ask ourselves, “Am I the self-righteous, older brother, or am I the self-destructive, younger brother?” We can compare and contrast ourselves with the two sons. That may be helpful, but that is not the main lesson of the story. We need to keep our eye on the Dad. The Dad shows us what our God is like. Instead of keeping our gaze on ourselves, we need to turn our attention to God.

That is my encouragement and aim for today’s message. Keep your eyes on God. Picking up from where we left off last week, Jesus is engaged in a verbal tug-of-war with the religious leaders in Jerusalem. In today’s passage, Jesus tells those men a story. He does so in the company of onlookers. Those men see themselves very clearly in the story. I want us, however, to see our God.

Our text is Matthew 21:33-46. The title of the message is “Our Unstoppable God.” As we move through the text, we will learn what I mean by calling God “unstoppable.”

There is great value in learning what our God is like. Not long ago, we took a three-month journey through the Book of Daniel. We did so on Sunday evenings. We read in Daniel 11:32, “The people who know their God shall stand firm and take action.” Our ability to be strong and courageous is directly linked to our knowledge of God. If we are barely familiar with Him, we will be weak and timid. But Oh, if we are intimately acquainted with our Lord, watch out! We will be a force to be reckoned with.

From our text today, I want to identify 6 specific attributes that belong to our God. Jesus uses words to paint a picture of what our God is like. We are going to gaze at this portrait. You and I are in the background, but we are going to focus on the foreground in an effort to behold our God.

1. **OUR UNSTOPPABLE GOD IS SOVEREIGN.**

The word *sovereign* is not one we use every day, but it is a good, useful word, and it is one that we need to understand as it applies to our God. As a noun, it means “supreme ruler.” I am using it as an adjective, and basically it means, “God does as He wishes, and He doesn’t have to ask for your permission or mine.” God doesn’t need our counsel. He never asks for our advice. God keeps His own counsel, and He does as He pleases.

I like the NLT of Isaiah 46:10 in which God declares, “Everything I plan will come to pass, for I do whatever I wish.” He does whatever He wishes because He is sovereign.

Our passage tells us something that God did, and He did it on His own initiative and with His own power. Look at v. 33. The master of the house represents God. Jesus is clearly drawing upon what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 5:1-7. In that beautiful OT text, God is depicted as having built, lovingly and carefully, a vineyard. In v. 7 of Isaiah 5, God reveals the identity of His vineyard. We read, For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant planting.”

The Jewish people did not petition God to become their God. No, God chose the Jewish people to be His people. In our Matthew passage, the tenants of the vineyard stand for the religious leaders. God chose them to care for His vineyard. They didn’t send in a resume and apply for the job. God chose them for the job.

Jesus said the same thing to His disciples. One day later in Passion Week, on Thursday night, Jesus would say to His disciples, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit” (John 15:16). God chose the tenants for His vineyard, and Jesus chose the apostles for His church. Both were expected to loving care for what God had planted, to tend it, help it grow, and to harvest it at the appropriate time.

Church is not our idea. It does not have human origins. God is the one who sovereignly instituted the Church. We are His vineyard, and He wants us to be fruitful. On the same night that Jesus told His disciples, “I chose you,” just moments before He said, “I am the Vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit” (John 15:5).

A century and half before now, every Sunday thousands and thousands of people packed out the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London to hear the pastor, Charles Spurgeon, preach. On one occasion, Spurgeon said:

There is no attribute more comforting to His children that that of God’s sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that Sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that Sovereignty overrules them, and that Sovereignty will sanctify them all.

We serve a God who sits upon a throne. He has not abdicated His throne. He has not resigned His position. He has not gone on vacation. He was on His throne when the first person in Wuhan, China got sick with the Corona virus, and He will be on His throne when the last person with that virus gets well, and He will be on His throne every moment in between.

What makes the sovereignty of God comforting is the knowledge is that our God is a God of love. If God were not a God of love, his sovereignty would be terrifying. But because God is love and is powerful and is wise, His sovereignty is a source of great comfort and assurance. It tells me that God’s got this; He’s got me; and He’s got you.

* I am thankful for the work and expertise of the CDC.
* I am thankful that Congress finally worked together and a passed a stimulus bill that will help millions of Americans.
* I am, ultimately, thankful for the tireless and courageous efforts of doctors, nurses, and medical care personnel.

But my faith and trust are in a sovereign God who sees me and who sees you, and who will see us through to the other side of this pandemic.

Our text also teaches us . . .

1. **OUR UNSTOPPABLE GOD IS WORTHY.**

Look at v. 34. The vineyard in Matthew 21 was not owned by the tenants. It was owned by the master of the house. Because it was owned by him, he was due a certain percentage of the produce. When the time for harvesting had come, he sent some of his servants to go retrieve what he was due.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God is your master. You are working for Him in His field or in His vineyard. Whatever you think you own, it really belongs to Him. We talk about my car, my house, my family my job, my money, my 401K. Guess what? Every last item, and every last penny belongs to Him not you. When you give something to God, you are not giving to Him something that belongs to you. You are simply giving back to Him what rightfully belongs to Him. God kindly lets you keep some of what is rightfully His.

We are told in Psalm 24:1, “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to Him.”

Since God own it all and us all, and since God kindly allows to eat His food, drink His water, and breathe His air, that means He is worthy of respect, our worship, our love, and our service. The God we serve is worthy. The English word for *worship* came from the Anglo-Saxon word *weorthscipe.* Our God is worthy; so, we love Him and adore Him, and honor Him with what we have, with what we do, and with who we are.

1. **OUR UNSTOPPABLE GOD IS PATIENT.**

In the story before us, the tenant did not want to honor the master. They did not want to give him what he was due. Notice vv. 35-36. When the master sent servants to them, they mistreated some and killed others. In the story Jesus tells, the servants stand for the prophets God had sent His nation.

Jesus speaks more plainly a couple of chapters later. Look at Matthew 23:29-31.

Let’s personalize this story. You have a rent house in OKC. You rent it out to a young man. He seems responsible. He pays for the first month up front. The second month comes. A week goes by and no rent check comes. You call up get young man. He sees that it is you and doesn’t answer. This happens several times. You tell a friend of your about it. He says he’s going to be in the city the next day, and he offers to go by on your behalf. When he knocks on the door, the young man answers it. The moment he mentions your name and says the word “rent,” the young man curses him up one side and down the other, and slams the door in his face.

Your friend reports back to you. You call your lawyer. He composes a strongly worded letter and tells you he is going to hand-deliver it. Again, the young man opens the door, and as soon as he mentions your name and that he is your lawyer, two other men come out of the house. All three men jump on the lawyer. They hit him, kick him, and throw him down the steps of your front porch. After a visit to the ER to get bandaged up and checked out, your lawyer tells you what happened.

How patient are you going to be at this point? Not very.

God’s prophets underwent far worse treatment and in far greater numbers; yet, God was patient and continued to call His people back to Himself.

We read in Romans 10:21 where God says to Israel, “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people.”

Do you ever think God has that same experience with you? He’s holding out his hands, He’s stretching forth His arms, but you are folding yours and turning your back.

Don’t do that to God. Turn back to Him. It has been said that if we will take one step in His direction, He will run ten in ours. James wrote, “Draw near to God, and He will draw hear to God” (James 4:8).

God is patient, but He is not forever patient; so, we need to draw near to Him while there is still time.

We would like for the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic to be over tomorrow, but it won’t be. Just maybe God is using this drawn out process as a patient way for drawing us to Himself.

1. **OUR UNSTOPPABLE GOD IS LOVING.**

Look at vv. 37-39. In the story Jesus told, the master does the unimaginable. He sends his son. He knows how these wicked men have treated his servants. How could he possibly choose to send His son? Why would he do such a thing?

And after God’s prophets have been killed by very people to whom they were sent, why would God send Jesus, His Son, to this wicked world? We are told the reason why in John 3:16. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son . . .”

What God did, He did out of love.

Unlike the master in the story who was hoping that the tenants would respect His son, God knew the outcome of Jesus coming to this world. While the master sent his son in hope, God gave His Son in love. There is a big difference in the two. God knew the tenants would viciously kill His Son, but God would use the death of Jesus to accomplish His goal.

All the way back in the first chapter of Matthew, an angel appeared to Joseph in a dream. The angel informed him that Mary “will be bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21).

While the master in the story sent his servants and his son to get something from the tenants for his benefit, God sent His prophets and gave His Son to this world to give them something for our benefit. It is something we could never get otherwise—salvation, a relationship with God.

Do you have that? Do you have a relationship with God through Jesus? When you get that, you get everything else—forgiveness, peace, joy, purpose, and real life, a life you will never lose.

1. **OUR UNSTOPPABLE GOD IS JUST.**

Jesus asked the leaders in Jerusalem a question in v. 40. Look at what the unsuspecting religious leaders said when Jesus asked them what the owner of the vineyard would do. Notice v. 41. Jesus has them where He wants them. They walked right into a theological trap.

Jesus quits telling a story, and He starts pointing a finger. He quotes from Psalm 118. Jesus is saying, “This story is really about you and about me. I am the stone that you have rejected, but regardless, I will end up being the chief stone that connects and supports this new edifice that God is building. We are no longer talking about a vineyard. We are talking about a Kingdom—God’s Kingdom. You are out, and God is bringing in a new people to do what you would not.”

Verse 44 is a word of judgment.

Do you remember the game show “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” hosted by Regis Philbin? He would ask the contestants a question. They might hem and how and conjecture, and ask the audience or call a friend. At some point, however, after supplying their answer, Regis would ask, “Is that your final answer?” They still had the chance to reconsider, to supply a different answer. When they said, “That’s my final answer,” time was up.

Our final answer about Jesus determines our final outcome. God’s eternal justice is just because He justly gives us what we ask for. If we say “no” to Jesus, God will say a “no” to us finally and eternally. If we say “yes” to Jesus, we receive an eternal “yes” from God.

1. **OUR UNSTOPPABLE GOD IS GRACIOUS.**

Maybe you have been wondering about where I get the idea that God is unstoppable. It is found right here in v. 43. God has established a Kingdom. His desire and plan are that the Kingdom would grow and grow. Many of the Jewish leaders didn’t want to participate with God in what He was doing. In fact, they actively worked against Him by opposing Jesus. That didn’t stop God.

Essentially God says, “Oh, you don’t want to work with Me? That is your final answer? OK.” He takes the Kingdom from the Jewish community primarily (not completely) and hands it to the Gentile community.

Neither you, nor I, nor anybody else is going to stop the progression of the Kingdom of God across this world. Communism has tried to stop it—not able. Totalitarianism has tried to stop—not successful. Islam has tried to impede the growth of God’s Kingdom—nope. Not able.

God has been gracious to us. His Kingdom is alive and well, and you can become a part of it by saying “yes” to Jesus. I urge you to say “yes.”

Look at v. 45. Those religious leaders saw themselves in the story Jesus told. Unfortunately, they did not see God. They knew Jesus was speaking about them, but what they didn’t understand that Jesus was also speaking to them. He was giving them a final chance. When God is speaking to you, the most important thing is what you do next. What they did next was nothing. Sometimes, nothing is the worst thing you can do.

Look at v. 46. Fear of the people kept them from arresting Jesus. For us, fear of people may be what keep us from trusting Jesus. For our own good, we need to fear God more than we fear people.

In 2010 a motion picture was released starring Denzel Washington and Chris Pine. The name of the film was *Unstoppable.* It was about a runaway locomotive. Through an odd series of events, there was no engineer on the train, and the unmanned train could not be slowed or stopped remotely. To make matters worse, eight of the trains 39 cars contained a highly flammable and toxic material. Were the train to derail in a populated area, it could cause a major disaster. It just so happens that the train would eventually travel through an urban area where it needed to slow down to successfully navigate a tight turn, but no one was at the controls, and the train was careening down those slender ribbons of steel at an unsafe speed.

As you might expect, two men work together and heroic-ally board the speeding train. One of the men makes it to the engine where he applies the brakes and prevents a disaster. The ending of the movie contradicts the title of the film. Instead of being unstoppable, the train is in fact stopped.

Most things that we think are unstoppable are. This corona virus is one of those things. It will be stopped sooner or later.

God, however, is not one of those things. He is, to be sure, unstoppable.