

# THE REJECTED KING

Luke 13:31-35

Second Sunday in Lent (Series C)

March 17, 2019

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the Second Sunday in Lent comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 13, verses 31 through 35. It is on page 739 of the pew Bible. As Jesus is journeying to Jerusalem for the last time, some friends, or maybe they're not friends, come to warn him about a threat to his life. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 13, beginning at verse 31, we read in Jesus' name.

<sup>31</sup> At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." <sup>32</sup> And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. <sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.' <sup>34</sup> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! <sup>35</sup> Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

*Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.*

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

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This gospel lesson kind of reads like a western, and I think that translating it into the language of a western might help us to grasp what's going on. It goes like this: some Pharisees come to Jesus and say to him, "You best be movin' along now, 'cuz we hear Herod is fixin' to kill ya'." Now when this happens in a western, you basically have two options. You can stay in town and face the guy who wants to kill you, in which case you might die. And you basically have no control over this; it all depends on the person who wrote the script. Your other option is to leave town, in which case you will probably live, but everyone will call you a coward. This seems to be what's happening in this text.

Jesus is on a journey. We don't know what town he's in when this happens, but we do know where he's going. He is on a journey to Jerusalem. So he's somewhere between Galilee—that was his home territory in northern Israel—and Jerusalem, which is in southern Israel. Quite a large portion of *The Gospel of Luke* takes place while Jesus is on this journey. In chapter 9 (v. 51), Jesus sets his face toward Jerusalem. That's when the journey begins. And it continues all the way through chapter 19, when he rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. Typically it only took a few days to walk from Galilee to Jerusalem, but Luke fills ten whole chapters with Jesus' activity while on this journey. So we figure, with all the miracles and teaching in these ten chapters, it took Jesus quite a bit longer than a few days. It was more like a tour. Jesus had a definite end in mind, but he had a lot to do along the way.

So it's somewhere in the middle of this journey that these Pharisees come and warn Jesus about Herod's intent. And it's hard to say whether these Pharisees are friendly toward Jesus or hostile. In general, most of the encounters Jesus had with the Pharisees were hostile. However,

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we do know that some of the Pharisees were actually friendly toward Jesus. Nicodemus is the prime example, but there seem to be a few others as well.

It may be that they warn Jesus of Herod's murderous intent because they are honestly trying to protect him. But it's also possible that their intentions are evil. It may be that they want Jesus out of their own region, so they're using Herod's plot to suit their own purposes. It may also be that they're making the whole thing up as part of their own plot to trap Jesus in Jerusalem. I tend to think this idea is right, that the Pharisees are just making it up, because later, at the end of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, Herod will actually get his chance to meet Jesus face to face. This happens after the Jews arrest Jesus and deliver him to Pilate. When Pilate learns that Jesus is from Herod's jurisdiction, he sends Jesus over to Herod, since Herod was also in Jerusalem for the Passover. But Herod doesn't find any guilt in Jesus, so all he does is mock him and send him back to Pilate (23:6-15). If Herod actually wanted to kill Jesus, he must have changed his mind, because he didn't do it when he got the chance.

So we don't know, exactly, what the Pharisees' motivation is here. What really matters, though, is how Jesus responds to it. Remember, the two basic options, which we learn from westerns, is to stay and stand up to the mean guy threatening your life or to run away and risk being called a coward. Jesus decides to run away. He tells the Pharisees that he is going to go on his way, but his reasons are different than the standard western plot. Jesus is going away, not to save his life, but to lose it. He says, **"I must go on my way ... for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem"** (13:33). Jesus accepts the threat against his life. He is actually on board with this. The location is what he disputes.

If Jesus stays where he is, he's not going to die. Even if Herod really is trying to kill him, and even if Herod does catch up to Jesus there, Jesus is not going to die there, because that is not the appointed place for Jesus to die. People have tried to kill Jesus before, but it never works. It will only work at the appointed time in the appointed place. The only scenario in which Jesus is actually going to die is if he continues on his journey to Jerusalem, and that is what Jesus insists on doing. That is what Jesus has intentionally been doing this entire journey. So he insists on continuing to Jerusalem.

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Then Jesus goes into a lament over Jerusalem. It's the holy city, which makes their unbelief all the more tragic.

A little history can be helpful here: Jerusalem became the capital and place of worship about four hundred years after Israel came out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. They came into the land of Israel around 1400 BC, and it was around 1000 BC that King David moved the capital from Hebron to Jerusalem and brought the Ark of the Covenant to the tabernacle there. It was then that Jerusalem became the holy city. So it wasn't always the holy city, but at that time it became so, because God promised to dwell above the mercy seat of the Ark. In the next generation, under David's son, King Solomon, the first temple was built. They had their ups and downs, but Jerusalem had remained the holy city for a thousand years now.

This, however, did not change human nature. Jerusalem, like every other city, refused to believe the Word of the Lord. God would send prophets to her, but she would not listen. Instead of listening, they persecuted them. A good example of this is the prophet Jeremiah, whom we read about in the Old Testament lesson. He was threatened with death because he spoke against the city and called them to repentance (Jer. 26:8-15). This was leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in the year 586 BC.

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God even told Jeremiah that the people of Jerusalem would fight against him (Jer. 1:19), but he went and called them to repentance anyway, because this is what God called him to do. And sure enough, the people did not listen, and King Nebuchadnezzar took the rulers into captivity in Babylon, where they remained for seventy years.

It's a pattern that develops throughout the Old Testament, that the prophets are rejected because the people don't want to heed their call to repentance.

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But God keeps sending prophet after prophet. So there comes a point, especially by the time we get to Jesus, where God starts to look foolish. Why would you keep sending prophets, knowing that they will be rejected? And why would you send your only Son, knowing that he will be killed? The answer, at least in the case of the prophets, is that some of the people will hear the Word and repent. It always seems to be a minority, but God preserves a remnant through the ministry of these prophets. And the answer in the case of Jesus is that it's actually the whole point of him coming. His purpose is to be rejected and killed, and this is the reason he set his face toward Jerusalem. Despite their opposition, and despite knowing that they will kill him, he goes there out of his love for them to be the sacrifice for their sins.

And I want you to notice how foolish this sounds, because it's the foolishness of this that accentuates the love of God. When Jesus goes to the cross to die, he doesn't do it for good people. He doesn't do it for people who really deserve it, but are just down on their luck. He doesn't do it for people who have been pleading with him to deliver them from their sins. He does it for people who don't want it. He does it for people who are telling him that if he doesn't shut up about being the Son of God, they're going to kill him. He does it for people who don't think they need any forgiveness. He does it for people who think they can obtain their own righteousness. Jesus does it for the people who don't deserve it. Think about this: Jesus offers himself as the sacrifice for the sins of people who want to kill him. He'll even pray, "**Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do**" (23:34).

And he's grieved by the whole thing. He laments the fact that the people of Jerusalem will cry for his blood. But his concern is not that he's going to die; he knows that's what he has to do. He laments that these are lost souls. He doesn't mind dying for them, but as long as they persist in their unbelief, they will never enjoy the benefits of his sacrifice for them.

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Here we see the compassion of God, who never desires that any should perish, for, even though their rebellion will work into God's plan to bring salvation to the entire world, Jesus still weeps over their rejection of him. He weeps, not for his sake, but for theirs. He doesn't mind dying for them. He just wants them to know what he is doing for them so that they might believe and live.

He feels like a mother hen, whose instinct is to gather her chicks under her wings, but they won't have it. Imagine how a mother hen would be if her chicks are running this way and that, willing to be anywhere but under her protection. That's how Jesus felt regarding Jerusalem. His concern was not for himself, but for them. So his emotional response is not anger, but sadness.

When we imagine how God must feel about our sins, we often project the emotion of anger onto him. But that's not what we see in this text. Anger is an appropriate response to sin, and God is capable of anger, but his wrath and anger over sin was poured out completely upon the Son of God, Jesus Christ. He does not continue to be angry over sin, and he is not angry over your sin.

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Our natural tendency is to think that God is angry over our sin. We think, *Oh, I've really done it this time. God will never forgive me.* We make this error, because we think of God as a strict master instead of a tender Father. But think about this. Think about whether our natural tendency is right or wrong: If a child runs away from home, how do the parents feel about that? Are they be more angry, or are they be more sad? They might be partially angry, because even good parents are still sinful. But the primary reaction is sadness. They love their child, and they hope that no harm will come.

If this is true for human parents, how much more for our perfect and merciful heavenly Father? He is grieved by our sin and unbelief, not because he is angry, but because he is saddened by our wandering away from him. Do not think of God as a strict master whom you must earn salvation from. That is not God. Think of God as a tender Father who desires to forgive, protect, and provide, because that is who he is.

So when you sin, do not hide from God. This has been our natural tendency since the first sin. But you cannot hide from God, you can only pretend that you're pulling it off. Do not hide from God. God is saddened by our sin, no doubt, because it is contrary to his good and gracious will for our lives. But he is not angry. God is not angry with you. Like a mother hen, his desire is to gather you under his protection. He is grieved most when we refuse his forgiveness.

God has dealt with your sin. God dealt with his own righteous anger when for a moment the Father turned his back on the Son and poured out all his wrath over sin. There the Son, a willing sacrifice, joyfully bore that condemnation for the sake of securing your eternal forgiveness. So God is not angry with you. God is never angry with you. He is gracious and loving toward you. His desire is for you to live and rejoice as his forgiven child. For this reason, Jesus journeyed toward the cross, to bear your sin, and secure for you and eternal redemption. He was rejected for you. So confess your sin, believe, and live. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.