

To Seek and To Save the Lost

Lament Over Jerusalem

Luke 13:31-35

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Scripture

Jesus is still on his way to Jerusalem from Galilee. He only has a few months left to live. He knows that he is going to Jerusalem to pay the penalty for people's sin by his death. He will sacrifice his life in order to reconcile sinners with a holy God.

Along the way Jesus is told that Herod wants to kill him. Undeterred, Jesus insists that he will fulfill the mission given to him by God to seek and to save the lost by dying for them in the city of Jerusalem.

Let's read about Jesus' lament over Jerusalem in Luke 13:31-35:

**³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."
³²And 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. ³³Nevertheless, 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.' ³⁴O 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! ³⁵Behold, 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!' " (Luke 13:31-35)**

Introduction

In *Time* magazine's regular column, "10 Questions," readers are given the opportunity to interview celebrities and world leaders through questions submitted via e-mail. In the

March 22, 2010, issue of *Time*, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, author of *Made for Goodness*, was featured. Here are two questions readers submitted, each followed by Archbishop Tutu's answer:

***Time*: After all you've seen and endured, are you really as optimistic as your book, *Made for Goodness*, says you are?**

Tutu: I'm not optimistic, no. I'm quite different. I'm hopeful. I am a prisoner of hope. In the world, you have very bad people – Hitler, Idi Amin – and they look like they are going to win. All of them – all of them – have bitten the dust.

***Time*: What is your favorite Bible verse and why?**

Tutu: Romans 5:8. “[While] we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” It sums up the Gospel wonderfully. We think we have to impress God so that God could love us. But he says, “No, you are loved already, even at your worst.”¹

In his answers to *Time* magazine, Archbishop Tutu summarized Jesus' own attitude. Jesus knows that there are very bad people in the world, and they will not overcome the love of God that is so marvelously displayed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus knows that he will indeed fulfill the mission that God had given to him to die for his people.

Lesson

The analysis of Jesus' lament over Jerusalem as set forth in Luke 13:31-35 shows us Jesus' loving determination to die in Jerusalem for his people.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Jesus' Message to His Enemies (13:31-33)
2. Jesus' Message to Jerusalem (13:34-35)

¹ “10 Questions,” *Time* magazine (3-22-2010), 4.

I. **Jesus' Message to His Enemies (13:31-33)**

First, let's look at Jesus' message to his enemies.

Notice the context of Jesus' message to his enemies. Jesus has been traveling from Galilee to Jerusalem. While traveling he has been giving people a series of warnings and various instructions. He had just warned people of the danger of being excluded from the kingdom of God, and urged people to be sure that they have entered the kingdom of God through the narrow door of faith and repentance (Luke 13:22-30).

While Jesus was warning people of the danger of being excluded from the kingdom of God, **at that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you"** (13:31).

Now, this was a credible threat. **Herod** had already killed John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12). Jesus' immense popularity among the people posed a huge threat to **Herod**, who had no qualms about eliminating rivals, opponents, or even family.

But why did the **Pharisees** inform Jesus of Herod's threat? We know from Luke 11:54 that for many months now the **Pharisees** were "lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say." Some commentators think that the **Pharisees** were conspiring with Herod to get rid of Jesus. Other commentators think that at least some of the **Pharisees** were sympathetic to Jesus and his message. Regardless of their motive, however, Herod's threat to kill Jesus was real.

So, how did Jesus respond to his enemies?

A. *Jesus' Message to Herod (13:32)*

First, notice Jesus' message to Herod.

As soon as Jesus heard from the Pharisees about Herod's threat to kill him, **he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and to-**

morrow, and the third day I finish my course’ ” (13:32).

Commentator R. Kent Hughes notes that “ ‘**Fox**’ was common parlance in Hebrew for a person with base cunning and was used to designate someone as insignificant and worthless. It was an expression of utter contempt. Significantly, Herod is the only individual whom Jesus is recorded as treating with contempt.”² A few months later, when Jesus stood in the presence of Herod on the night of his betrayal and the day before his crucifixion, he would not speak a word to Herod at all, again showing contempt for him. As Leon Morris has said, “When Jesus has nothing to say to a man, that man’s position is hopeless.”³ Herod had already, as far as Jesus was concerned, to use the words of Archbishop Tutu, “bitten the dust.”

Jesus’ answer to Herod is marvelous. It is really a two-fold answer. First, he said, “**Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures . . .**” Jesus will continue to do the work his heavenly Father had assigned him to do. He would demonstrate his power over the kingdom of Satan by casting demons out of people. Furthermore, he would demonstrate his love for people by performing cures and healing them of their sicknesses.

And second, Jesus said that he would continue this ministry “ . . . **today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.**” Some commentators think that Jesus was making a cryptic reference to his resurrection. He would be killed and buried, but raised back to life after three days in the tomb. More likely, however, is that “**today and tomorrow, and the third day**” was a common poetic expression that people in that day used to refer to a short, definite period of time. In other words, Jesus wanted Herod to know that he had work to do **today and tomorrow**. His work would end on **the third day**. But Herod would not determine that day. God would determine

² R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 104.

³ Leon Morris, *Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 249.

that day. Nothing, not even Herod, would stop Jesus from finishing the task that the Father had given to him.

At age 26, Ken Elzinga joined the faculty of the University of Virginia. After a tenured colleague warned him that being explicit about his faith would hinder his career, Elzinga was stunned to see a flier with his face on it placed at a prominent campus location. A campus ministry had posted it to advertise a talk he had agreed to give.

A relatively new believer, Elzinga worried. Would fellow professors think less of him? Might this harm his tenure chances? He experienced a dark night of the soul, returning to campus and secretly taking the poster down. But, after hours of soul-searching, he concluded that his life was not about career ambition but about faithful discipleship, and that being private about his faith was not an option. So, the next morning, Elzinga put the poster back up.

In the four decades since, Elzinga has been named professor of the year multiple times and is still a speaker in high demand. He will be the first to say that serving only one master has been liberating. Why? Because pleasing an audience of one makes us less anxious, less sensitive to criticism, and more courageous.⁴

Elzinga is reflecting the mind of Jesus, who once said to the woman at the well in Samaria, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work” (John 4:34). Jesus was telling Herod that he would keep casting out demons, healing people, proclaiming the good news of the gospel, and even go to death on the cross until all his saving work was done. Jesus was serving one master, and that was his Father.

B. Jesus’ Message to the Pharisees (13:33)

And second, let’s observe Jesus’ message to the Pharisees.

⁴ Alec Hill, “The Most Troubling Parable,” *Christianity Today* (July/August 2014).

Jesus' message to the Pharisees was even sharper. He said in verse 33, **"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."** Jesus' message to the Pharisees is full of irony. **Jerusalem** was the city where God placed his name. It was the city where God had his temple built. It was the center of worship for the people of God. Surely, **Jerusalem** was the last place where one of God's prophets would be killed? Yet, Jesus knew that **Jerusalem** was exactly the place where he would be killed.

Jesus also knew that he would finish his work by dying on the cross for the lost sinners he had come to seek and to save. What Jesus literally said at the end of verse 32 is, "I will be finished." This statement anticipates Jesus' climactic statement he would make in just a few months while hanging on the cross, "It is finished" (John 19:30). By the time Jesus died on the cross, he was finished with his earthly ministry of casting out demons and performing cures. He was finished with his earthly work of keeping the Law of God. He was finished with life itself, at least for his three days in the grave. Most of all, he was finished suffering the penalty that we deserve: the wrath of God against our sin. Praise God, Jesus finished all the work that the Father appointed for him to do!

The finished work of Jesus gives us assurance regarding our own salvation. There is nothing more that we need to do to get rid of the guilt of our sin if we are trusting in Christ. By his perfect obedience and death on the cross, Jesus has done everything necessary to make us right with God.

Archbishop Tutu reminds us of Romans 5:8, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." This *is* the good news of the gospel. Jesus lived a perfect life and died to finish the work of salvation for sinners like you and me. And because we are now united to Christ by faith we do not have to worry about what others think about us or say to us. Like our Savior, we

serve one master and it is wonderfully liberating. Pleasing an audience of one makes us less anxious, less sensitive to criticism, and more courageous to finish the task our Father has given to each one of us.

II. Jesus' Message to Jerusalem (13:34-35)

And second, let's look at Jesus' message to Jerusalem.

Jesus had answered Herod and the Pharisees. The mention of his death in Jerusalem turned his thoughts to his people, represented by Jerusalem.

A. *Jesus' Longing (13:34)*

First, let's notice Jesus' longing.

Listen to the pathos in Jesus' voice as he says in verse 34, **"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!"** Jesus expressed his longing for people to find safety and shelter in him, but they would not. He used a wonderful image to communicate his love and concern: that of a mother bird gathering her brood under her wings. The picture of safety and protection under the wings of a bird is actually a common image in sacred Scripture. Listen to the following passages:

- Psalm 17:8: Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings.
- Psalm 36:7: How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
- Psalm 57:1: Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of de-

struction pass by.

- Psalm 61:4: Let me dwell in your tent forever! Let me take refuge under the shelter of your wings!
- Psalm 63:7: For you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy.
- Psalm 91:4: He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

Under the wings of the bird, the chicks find safety and security. This is not a sentimental image. This is what Jesus longed to do for Jerusalem. And it is what he longs to do for us today as well.

I don't think I will ever forget a simple illustration that Dr. James Montgomery Boice, the former pastor of the historic Tenth Presbyterian Church, gave during a sermon I heard at a worship service. He told the story of a fierce fire that raged through a farm. Scores of people tried to save the farm and the animals. Unfortunately, the fire was so fierce that all the animals perished. Horses, cows, sheep, and chickens all perished in the destructive blaze. The heat was so intense that it took several days before people could go through the farm to examine the destruction. There were burnt animals everywhere. It was a dreadful scene. But then one of the people heard a noise. And they heard it again. Following the sound of the faint noise they came to a hen. Her body was charred and her wings were spread out. She, of course, was dead – burned by the heat of the fire. However, when her feathers were lifted, the people were amazed to find a brood of live chicks under her wings! They were safe and secure. Their mother had given her life so that they might live.

That is a marvelous illustration of what Jesus did for his people. He spread his wings, as it were, and he bore the fiery wrath of God. He gave his life so that we might live.

But, sadly, some in Jesus' day **were not willing** to find

shelter under his wings. They **were not willing** to allow Jesus to bear the full force of the Father's wrath against their sin. In that case, they would have to experience the Father's wrath against their sin by themselves.

It is still true that if you are not willing to allow Jesus to shelter you under his wings, then you must experience the wrath of the Father against your sin by yourself.

B. Jesus' Prophecy (13:35)

And second, let's observe Jesus' prophecy.

Because the people refused to turn to Jesus and find shelter in him, he gave this prophecy in verse 35a, "**Behold, your house is forsaken.**" Some commentators say that Jesus was referring to Jerusalem as a whole as a house for God's people. Others say that Jesus was speaking more specifically about the temple, which was the house of God. Either way, the prophecy came true. God withdrew his protection from Jerusalem. His holy presence no longer dwelt in the temple. And within a matter of years the city was overthrown and its temple completely destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD.

What happened to Jerusalem will happen to any nation, any city, any church, or any individual who refuses to find shelter in Christ. If we will not turn to Christ and find shelter in him through faith and repentance, we will be forsaken by God, and eventually we will be destroyed.

But, as terrible as that prophecy is, that is not God's final word. There is still time to come to him in faith. There is still time to find shelter under his wings. There is still time to be saved, as there was for Jerusalem. Jesus ended this discourse by saying in verse 35b, "**And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'**" This quotation from Psalm 118:26 was properly quoted by Luke again in the mouths of the pilgrims as they cele-

brated Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem (cf. Luke 19:38). So, perhaps Jesus was making a prophecy about his Triumphal Entry.

More likely, however, Jesus was speaking of his Second Coming at the end of history. On that great day every one will know that Jesus is indeed the only Savior of sinners, including the people who rejected him in Jerusalem. Every eye will see him, every knee will bow before him, and every tongue confess his name as Lord. His Second Coming will mean salvation for many, but damnation for those who never received Jesus by faith. He invited them to come under his sheltering wing, but they would not, and by the time they see Jesus as he truly is, it will be too late. Just as Jerusalem's walls were torn down, its buildings burned, and its people led away in chains, so too those who reject Jesus and his offer of salvation will suffer eternal death under the righteous wrath of God.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Jesus' lament over Jerusalem as set forth in Luke 13:31-35, we should seize the opportunity to find safety in Christ.

The most important application is personal. The only way to avoid the coming destruction is to find shelter in Jesus Christ. You find shelter in Jesus by acknowledging that you are a sinner in need of a Savior. You believe that Jesus obeyed God perfectly and that he paid the penalty for your sin. You ask Jesus to bear your sins and to credit you with his righteousness. And then you live your entire life in obedience to Jesus as gratitude for his sacrificial death in your stead. Amen.

Mission Statement

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*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Jesus, in the passage we studied today you demonstrated your loving determination to die in Jerusalem for your people. Thank you for your determination and resolve to save sinners like us. Thank you for dying for us while we were yet sinners.

Jesus, if there is anyone who has not yet repented of sin and turned to you in faith, will you please grant that person repentance and faith today?

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!