

The God of Sorrow

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[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 13, reading from verse 31. At that time, some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, Leave this place and go somewhere else.

Herod wants to kill you. 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. 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.

Luke, 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. Amen.

Do please take a seat, and it will be helpful if you're able to have those verses from Luke's Gospel open in front of you. So I wonder, I wonder how you think about God, how you imagine him in terms of his attitude to you, and in terms of his attitude to humanity as a whole, and how you think about Jesus.

[1 : 3 2] I wonder again how you think about him in terms of his journey to the cross, in terms of Jesus' death. See, I suspect for many of us, if not most of us, I suspect there are times when we kind of drift into imagining that Jesus was trapped into his crucifixion, kind of railroaded into it, overcome by powerful forces in the world around him, you know, wrongfully arrested and tried and then executed unjustly.

Well, this passage this morning says, Jesus does as he pleases. Whatever forces might be arrayed against him, Jesus does as he intends.

Similarly, there's that danger that we drift into imagining that God's dominant attitude to the human race, that it's an attitude of judgmental anger.

But once again, this passage corrects that impression. Whilst we certainly don't reject entirely a place for righteous anger, still the impression of these verses here is of a God who sorrows over humanity, who thinks of us as precious, wayward children.

So, folks, let's come to God's word this morning. Let's come willing to have our assumptions and our perceptions checked and corrected. Let's listen to who God says he is and how he says history unfolds rather than to our kind of default automatic ideas of how we think things might be.

[3 : 0 6] In these verses, we meet the ruler who is no threat, set against the saviour who does as he pleases. And then we meet the city that will not listen, set against the saviour who longs to comfort.

So, first up, we have Herod. This is not the same Herod who was in charge around Jesus' birth, but this is another Herod. This is the Herod who executed John the Baptist, and this is the Herod who Jesus will eventually be sent to during his trial prior to his execution.

This is Herod Antipas, the ruler over Galilee and Perea. So, he's not the ultimate authority. His power is subject to the Roman Empire, but in functional terms, for the people on the ground in their day to day, well, his power is perhaps the most significant reality for them in these areas where he holds sway.

And certainly, therefore, certainly he has the power to make good on the threat that he makes in verse 31, this threat to kill Jesus. Herod's not going to get into trouble with higher authorities for doing that any more than he did for killing John the Baptist at his wife's request.

Herod has the influence in this territory. What he says, what he says goes. He has the power. He has the armies. He is able to arrest and or execute anybody who he chooses.

[4 : 39] And for reasons unspecified, we learn here that Herod, Herod is opposed to Jesus. For whatever reason it might be, Herod wants to kill him. And for Jesus, there's little hope of changing his mind, little hope of avoiding him.

If he remains in Herod's territory. And therefore, therefore, obviously the wise course of action is get out of Herod's sphere of influence. Retreat. Leave this place. Go somewhere else.

That's the sensible course of action, the conventional wisdom, as it were, the straightforward path. So what does Jesus say in response?

Well, 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'll 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.

Jesus is quite definite. First up, Jesus calls Herod a fox. Now, folks, first, let's get this modern slang use of the term right out of your heads.

[5 : 46] If you are thinking Jesus is commenting on Herod's physical attractiveness, this is way off base. Move on. What about, though, what about our longer established metaphorical use of the fox?

Are the fox as cunning, as wise, as crafty? However, that idea is popularized today. Our use of the metaphor of the fox as crafty goes back, apparently, to a 12th century Latin poem to the history of Reynard the fox.

And in fact, it seems quite clear that some version of this idea was around much before the 12th century, around in Jesus' day as well. Because in the literature that the rabbis produced around Jesus' day, you encounter this idea of the fox as kind of typical of a sort of low cunning.

But, alongside that picture, much more prevalent, actually, at that time, the picture of the fox is used as a picture of insignificance.

The fox compared to the lion. So, for instance, one rabbi says it's better to be a lion's tail than a fox's head. The fox is worthless, is insignificant, is not to be concerned with.

[7 : 02] And I think perhaps both of these ideas, the low cunning and the insignificance, both of these kind of combine into one in Jesus' attitude to Herod. And so a guy called T.W. Manson, he says, to call Herod that fox is as much as to say that he is neither a great man nor a straight man.

He has neither majesty nor honor. And so the expression is thoroughly contemptuous. I think if you want to pick one of the two, then the fox is insignificant is the primary idea here.

Because Jesus' attitude in these verses, this shows that he's profoundly unconcerned about any threats that Herod makes, isn't he? Herod can make all the attempts on his life he likes.

Herod can breathe out threat after threat. And others might understandably advise Jesus to flee in response. But says Jesus, I'm just going to keep on doing what I'm doing.

Today, tomorrow, and the day after, I'll be driving out demons and healing. That was always the plan. That is still the plan. And then on the third day, I'll be done with that and I'll move along then. Thank you very much.

[8 : 11] Nothing's going to change. I mean, you and I, we'd think it would be reasonable at least to accelerate your plans a little bit, you know, make plans to leave tomorrow perhaps, move up the schedule.

Surely that at least would be proportionate. I mean, why risk antagonizing Herod? But no. No, Jesus says he will do exactly as he intends.

No more, no less, no change. I will do as I choose. So friends, friends, Jesus is not being driven down to Jerusalem to try and escape from an angry ruler.

Jesus has no intention of fleeing for his life to get away from Herod. No, Jesus is headed for Jerusalem for precisely the opposite reason. Jesus is headed for Jerusalem because that's the plan he set out way back in chapter 9.

He resolutely set out for Jerusalem. This is the gradual journey that he's been on for four chapters and is going to continue through several more chapters. This is the journey that far from intending to preserve him from death at Herod's hands is in fact intended to lead him to death.

[9 : 22] That's what he says here, isn't it? Verse 33, surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem. I mean, that's a comment on Herod's powerlessness. Herod can't execute him elsewhere, but it's also a comment on what Jesus knows awaits him in Jerusalem.

As a prophet, he will die in Jerusalem. So Jesus is not herded to his death by hostile forces.

Jesus doesn't go to the cross unwittingly, like cattle too stupid to know what awaits. No, Jesus goes knowingly. Jesus goes willingly.

Jesus pays the price of his own free choice. Jesus chooses to make this sacrifice for your sake and for mine. Jesus is the Savior who does exactly as he planned, irrespective of this ruler who's no threat to him at all.

Now, from this, there's a couple of things that I'd encourage you to take away. The first, the first is I want us to go away with that gentle correction of that tendency in our thinking.

[10 : 40] Whatever extent you found yourself thinking, poor Jesus, herded into that trap by the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Roman authorities and the scribes and the teachers and the whoever, to whatever extent you thought of this as inflicted on him against his will.

Well, please see here, as in countless other passages, please see that he goes of his own choice and his own volition. Jesus chose the cross.

Secondly, secondly, we might look here for a correction of our own attitudes and inclinations with respect to how we relate to external forces and powers and authorities.

Because the same God who had his purposes to achieve in Jesus' life also has his purposes in our lives. And the same God who was perfectly capable of preserving Jesus from death at Herod's hands, and for that matter, the same Jesus, so the same God who could permit his life to be taken by the soldiers, folks, that same God is at work today, here in this world right now.

He is sovereign over our lives today. He is able to achieve that which he intends moment by moment and day by day. Now, that doesn't mean that we will always achieve what we intend, but God will always achieve what he intends.

[12 : 10] As Bishop Ryle puts it, still when we have done all, we should remember that though duties are ours, events are God's. There are things expected of us, but God determines what will result.

And this means, this means we don't need to fear murderous authorities or any other power, whether greater or lesser than that. We do not need to fear. We can do with confidence that to which we are called, whatever stands opposed to us, because nothing set against God will prosper.

So, friends, fear not. Then secondly, then secondly in these verses, we see Jesus' attitude to Jerusalem.

Verse 33, surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem. The idea of saying that seems to be a sense of, it just wouldn't do. It wouldn't be fitting for a prophet to die outside of Jerusalem, outside of the center of power and the center of national religion.

See, the fact that prophets do typically die in Jerusalem, the fact that Jerusalem can be characterized as you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, this characterization of Jerusalem shows just how deeply corrupt the nation has become.

[13 : 38] Time after time after time, God's people have rejected the messengers sent to her, have refused to listen to God's voice, have objected to the prophets calling her to repentance and calling her to faith in God.

That's been characteristic of the nation down through the ages and it is still characteristic in Jesus' day. And we're going to see that attitude to the prophets sent from God.

We'll see that attitude reach its culmination when the city in a few chapters' time cries out for Jesus to be crucified. And therefore, therefore we could reasonably imagine, we would expect, wouldn't we, that God's attitude to this city and indeed to the nation that the city is characteristic of and indeed the world that is, if anything, more rebellious, we would imagine that God's attitude will be one of judgmental anger, wouldn't we?

That God will be inclined to hurl down fire from heaven. I'm pretty sure that would be our attitude rejected time after time. Sooner or later we say enough is enough.

We conclude this is too painful. This is unacceptable and we lash out or at the very least we turn our backs. That would be an understandable attitude for God to have, wouldn't it?

[15 : 00] But it isn't what we see here. Now the second half of verse 34, Jesus says, Jesus says, how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings.

See, Jesus' own attitude to this city that rejects God or this city that rejects him, Jesus' attitude isn't anger but longing. Not punishment but the offer of shelter.

This picture of a bird spreading out its wings to offer shelter. It is both a natural picture and a scriptural one. I read a couple of accounts of birds in the face of a forest fire or whatever of them gathering their chicks under their wings and sheltering them there as the fire raged and giving their lives to keep their children safe.

And the allegorical point in that story is certainly valid that Christ's willingness to give his life for ours, it would be lovely if we could point to that but sadly it looks like the accounts of that particular behavior seem to be apocryphal rather than actual.

But what is more certain are the accounts from farmers of watching cats stalking the young chicks around the farmyard and those chicks scurry for refuge with their mother and hide under her wings.

[16 : 21] The cat being much more reluctant to threaten the larger bird. And then there's the video evidence online of hens offering shelter from the rain to their precious brood.

This is how birds behave. Hens gather their chicks to keep them safe. Hens are willing to pay a price to pay a cost to keep their children safe just like human parents do.

And this isn't the first time that this image appears in the Bible either. We read it in Psalm 91 a few minutes ago. Verse 4 He will cover you with His feathers and under His wings you will find refuge.

His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. God offers refuge and safety to His people down through the pages of His Word. Deuteronomy 32 talks about an eagle protecting its young in this way.

Ruth chapter 2 Boaz says to Ruth May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord the God of Israel under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

[17 : 24] refuge. This idea of offering refuge and safety to His people this idea has been God's consistent attitude down through the ages.

This is how God acts. This is how God views His people even though they have consistently rejected Him and His messengers still this has been and continues to be God's attitude and approach.

which Jesus Himself here kind of identifies with and adopts for Himself God's care for His people as evidenced in the past.

And so so too today. God's fundamental disposition towards the world God's attitude to humanity is still the same as it was then.

Jesus looks not just at Jerusalem but looks at a whole world that rejects Him and says how often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings and you were not willing.

[18 : 34] Sadly sadly that unwillingness it's all too often characteristic of so many isn't it? The unwillingness and yet and yet Jesus stands there with His arms outstretched.

Jesus still longs to gather the children of this earth to gather young and older like still longs to gather us into His protection into the safety of His wings into the warmth of His embrace.

Folks if that remained His attitude towards this city that He knew had sought the death of God's messengers that He knew would call for His own death friends if that remained His attitude to this city I think it's fair to say it remains His attitude to you as well whatever it is that you might have done however many times you might have rejected Him however much you have been living your own way instead of His that Jesus who stands and weeps over Jerusalem that Jesus who calls out for her children to gather under His wings that Jesus that Jesus will not reject you if you come to Him seeking refuge.

So folks let's pattern our vision of who God is let's imagine His attitude to us not on faulty assumptions and incorrect comparison to our own approaches and attitudes let's not make that the basis of who we think God is instead let's see the Jesus who stands with His arms outstretched to gather the children in let's see the Jesus who goes willingly to the cross not coerced by forces beyond His control but doing exactly as He chooses and paying the price to purchase our pardon let's pray Lord Jesus thank you thank you for this vision in your word of your attitude to this world to the human race that you have created thank you that we see afresh your desire your willingness to gather even the most rebellious of children into the warmth of your embrace that we can come and find refuge and safety and shelter under your wings thank you that you chose to pay the price to be able to offer that refuge thank you for that precious gift given to us offered to one and to all thank you

Lord Jesus Amen Amen Amen like say a tent I let's lèn sand se o tofä h o to ath o a