

Luke 13:31-35 AM

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- [0 : 0 0] Our Lord Jesus Christ, you've said to us, you've invited us to come to you if we're weary and heavy burdened, and you will give us rest.
- And so we pray now as we hear your word, that you would give us the trust we need to do just that, and that you would take our weariness and our loads, and grant us safety under the protection of your wings.
- And we pray this in your name. Amen. Please be seated. If you are new, our practice is to work through different passages of the Bible, and we began a series last week in Luke chapter 13.
- So if you'd like to open the Bible where Patty just finished reading, on page 873, we are following Jesus on his way to Jerusalem.
- And every footstep is taken in the shadow of the cross. And he is teaching about what a delight the kingdom of God is.
- [1 : 0 9] And he's pictured it last week as a lavish feast, which has more joy, more satisfaction for all our longings than we could possibly imagine. And the question that touches off this whole section that we're going to look at through these next weeks was in last week's passage, verse 23.
- And it sounds like a very fine question at first.
- But when you think about it more carefully, there are two problems with this question. The first is, it's very like the question that the serpent asked Eve in the Garden of Eden.
- Remember God had given them every tree but one to eat from. And the snake comes up to Eve with his snaky question, shifting the focus from God's goodness to grace, to suggest that somehow because God has held one tree back, he's holding out on you by not allowing you to have it.
- Did God really say that? He said, perhaps you can't really trust God. I know he says he loves you. But basically God, this is what's behind it. Basically God is stingy, insecure, uncaring, he wants to keep the best for himself.
- [2 : 2 9] Will those who are saved be few? The assumption is that I am more compassionate and caring than God is. I mean, how dare God decide who should be saved?
- That's the first question. That's the first problem with this question. The second problem is that it's the question of a religious moralist. That is someone who's trying to build their own self-righteousness.
- Someone who can't fully trust the grace of God to save them and thinks that their saving is up to them, keeping God's rules and doing good. And the problem that we've seen throughout Luke's gospel is that Jesus doesn't respect that point of view.
- He keeps welcoming the wrong people into the kingdom, people who are morally compromised, outsiders and sinners. And as we're going to see through the next few weeks, the main thrust of this section of Luke's gospel is the madness of the mercy of God.

It's the scandal of salvation that it goes to people who we think don't deserve it. That Jesus has not just come for people like us, but for people who are not like us.

[3 : 40] And right before Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son, which we'll come to in chapter 15, the Pharisees are moaning and complaining about the fact that Jesus receives sinners and even eats with them.

So the wideness of the mercy of Jesus Christ is deeply offensive to the religious Pharisees and to all who are working very hard to prove themselves worthy of God by keeping God's rules.

And the thing about playing that game is we have to be better than others to be part of the few. You know, to be righteous in my behavior is only worth it if I can be a little bit self-righteous and look down on others, right?

I mean, there has to be some payback for all my religious observance, all that denying myself and living for others. I mean, I've done what I should do.

Now it's up to God to count me among the few. And those of you who were here last week, you might remember that Jesus drove the conversation in two directions.

[4 : 45] The first is he drove the conversation away from the man back to Jesus himself. Away from his own moral goodness to say, there's one point of entry into the kingdom of God.

Strive to enter by the narrow door. I am the door. And the way you come into the kingdom is not by what you're achieving and not by all that you're doing, but by entering the blessing of God through me.

And you remember Jordan said, the question is not, will the saved be few, but will the saved be you? And there is a time coming, Jesus says, when the door will be closed, the opportunity you must take now or you may miss out in the end.

And the second direction Jesus takes him is he finishes last week's passage with a heart-melting picture of the kingdom of God as this lavish feast put on by God himself.

And all the wrong people will be there. Not just a few people like us, but men and women and boys and girls from north and south and east and west all feasting at God's table. And it's hard for us to get into the shoes of the Pharisees here, harder for us in some ways.

[5 : 59] But it's shocking and sacrilegious to the Pharisee. So you see in verse 31, at the beginning of our passage, they interrupt Jesus. At that very hour, some Pharisees come to him and say, get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.

Now, it's hard to know exactly why the Pharisees say this. Have they suddenly changed sides and joined Jesus' team? I don't think so.

Are they trying to corral Jesus down to Jerusalem because he's up in Galilee where Herod is king, so that they might kill him themselves? Or do they want to get rid of Jesus from the region?

He's a bit of a pest. And the commentators all are suspicious, and I think we're right to be suspicious of what the Pharisees are saying to him. Because Jesus regards their advice, their command to him, as acting in collusion with Herod.

So he tells them to go back and report to Herod. Mind you, it's no empty threat. I mean, Herod has already demonstrated his lethal power by having John the Baptist beheaded.

[7 : 15] Surely the sensible thing for Jesus would be to say to these Pharisees, well, thank you very much. I've got to run and run as far as he can. But he does not.

He knows Herod is after him. He knows the Pharisees will reject him. And he knows Jerusalem will also reject him. But even in the face of massive rejection and hostility, his love drives him onto the cross.

And we get one of the most precious and moving insights into the heart of Jesus here in the passage that was just read for us. It's almost as though as things grow darker and the opposition gathers and the thunderclouds threaten to storm, his love and his determination shine more brightly.

And Jesus reveals two things about himself in this passage. And I'm just going to make these two points. The first is he reveals himself as the king of love.

See, Herod thinks of himself as the king of northern Israel. But like most powerful people, he is deeply insecure. His main objective is to stay in power and to remove anybody who is a threat to him.

[8 : 32] Have you noticed that about people in power? And as Jesus' popularity grows and Herod's numbers dwindle, he's already had John the Baptist beheaded. But now this is how kings and this is how the powerful of the world respond to threats.

And so Jesus sends these Pharisees back to Herod with a message. And it's a little bit pokey. He says, tell Herod that he's a pretender.

That his kingship is a disgrace. That's why he begins, not so politely, tell Herod who is a fox. This is not just sly and crafty.

It's a Jewish expression for someone who thought he was a lion, but was in fact small fry. It would be like, say, tell King Herod that weasel, that poser, that cream puff, that counter...

You get the idea. And then he points to his own credentials as the true king of God's people. He says, look what I've done and look what I'm doing. Just as the God in the Old Testament promised that the coming king would deliver his people from diseases and demons and sickness, I cast out demons.

[9 : 46] I heal people of all diseases. Have a look. Blind, lame, I've raised the dead. Blind, and if you look carefully, everything I do is out of compassion and kindness, because that's what it means to be the true king, the king of love.

And then he says, verse 32, I do this today and I do it tomorrow, and on the third day I finish. And the word my course is not there in the original.

It's literally, I am finished, I am fulfilled, I am completed, because on the third day when I die in Jerusalem, God will fulfill his purposes through me as I give my life on the cross.

So two radically different views of God's true king. Jesus is not trying to do everything to preserve his life, but he's willingly giving his life up for the sake of his people.

He's not using his power to keep his power, but in love and care for others, he's giving his power away. This is what Jesus always does.

[10 : 52] He's not a victim. Herod is not able to steal his life away. And the greatest thing that God's king is going to do is the greatest act of love. He's going to carry our griefs and sorrows right to the cross.

He's going to give his life as the Lord lays on him the sins of us all to bring forgiveness and to bring life and peace for all. So you see, the question of how many are going to be saved and all the threats swirling around Jesus, they're all bound up with his death because Jesus knows exactly what's in store for him and he goes and he chooses to pay the price.

I must go up to Jerusalem. That's a God word. That is where I will be fulfilled. That is where my ministry will be fulfilled. That is the will of God. And even though those around him treat him with suspicion and hostility, he shows he is the true king driven by love to die for his people.

That's the first thing he reveals about himself. He's the king of love. But secondly, he also reveals himself as the God of love. And every now and then in the Gospels, we have a privilege of seeing right deep into Jesus' heart.

And in verse 34, he lays his heart there to us in this lament as he cries out, verse 34, Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem.

[12 : 21] 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.

This is the heart of the mission of God. This is the heart of Jesus Christ breaking for the people, the very people who should receive him and will put him to death.

And as he lays his heart bare, he strips away all pretense from Jerusalem, the city of God. And he tells us the true nature of this city is to reject God.

Yes, it was God's chosen city. But it hated every message from God and took it out on every messenger from God by killing them. It kills the prophets.

It stones those sent to it, which is exactly why Jesus must go there to die. And do you remember when Jesus gets to Jerusalem in Luke chapter 19? The first thing he does before he goes into the temple, do you remember?

[13 : 25] He weeps. He weeps over the city. His heart breaks in longing and love for the city of God. And you can hear these tears forming in these words here.

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how I've longed to gather you as a mother hen gathers her chicks, but you were not willing. Now, this is an open claim of Jesus Christ to be God himself.

Because often in the Old Testament, God pictured himself as a protective mother bird, sometimes in rescue and sometimes in salvation, sometimes in guidance and sometimes in protection, always in love and compassion.

And Jesus deliberately steps into this role and takes the role of God to himself now. Now, I've got all sorts of Old Testament passages written in my notes here, but I think we might get lost if we go papering through the Old Testament.

Let me mention, well, let's turn to one in Psalm 36, back on page 465. I'd like to hear some flipping of paper if you have your Bible open, 465.

[14 : 40] One of them is in Deuteronomy, where God pictures himself as a great big mother bird and says, how precious you are to me.

And when you fall out of the nest, what God does is he swoops underneath and catches them on his wings, something many of us have experienced. But in Psalm 36, verse 7, we read this.

How precious is your steadfast love, O God. The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. Precious is something personal and intimate, something I value more than life itself.

It's too good to really express in words, although David does give it a go. It's something humbling and reassuring. And what does it look like? Why is it precious?

What does it look like to take shelter, to take refuge under the shadow of his wings? Verses 8 and 9. They feast on the abundance of your house. You give them to drink from the river of your delights.

[15 : 49] For with you is the fountain of life, and in your light we see light. It's straight back to last week's picture of the kingdom Jesus gave us.

That entering the kingdom of God is like coming into the house of God, where there's plenty of joy and plenty of satisfaction and plenty of longings, more than our longings could be met.

And to take refuge under the shadow of his wings means that all of us are refugees in one way, shape or form, from the evil done to us on from the evil and sin and waywardness of our own lives.

So back in Luke 13, Jesus deliberately steps into this role of God and says, I am so full of the goodness of God for us that taking refuge under the shelter of my wings is salvation and faith.

That salvation and coming to Jesus is not try harder, jump higher, run faster for Jesus, but is allowing ourselves to be gathered to Jesus under his protection and grace.

[16 : 57] And this, I think, is the heart of the beauty of our passage this morning. We've had these two brilliant pictures of the kingdom. Last week, we saw that coming to Jesus, coming to the kingdom, is not inviting Jesus into my heart, but is entering into this greater reality of God's house to feasting.

This week, it is coming under the wings of Jesus Christ, allowing him to be God, allowing him to be your God and my God, and looking to him for protection and for life and for joy and not all the other things we waste at, well, very important things that we spend so much time on.

The only thing that keeps us out of the kingdom of God is our refusal to come under the wings of Jesus. He says, you are not willing. This is how we put ourselves out of the feast or outside of Jesus' protection, if we refuse him.

And when we do that, we have to join the group that is outside the kingdom and the group that, in the end, has to put him to death. And that is why, in verse 35, Jesus does not hide the truth, finally, but issues an urgent warning.

Behold, he says, your house is forsaken. Jerusalem, Israel. And the entire system of religion.

[18 : 16] And you will not see me again until I come in judgment. And I commend this passage to you because it is a very moving and beautiful revelation of Jesus.

He's the king of love who is determined to give his life for us. He responds to rejection and distraction. He keeps offering himself to us.

And being gathered under his wings is the central picture here. You may have noticed that two of my grandchildren are in the building today, five and three.

And I'm at the hero stage right now. Being great. It'll go. I know it'll go pretty soon. But a few weeks ago, I went down to visit their place.

And the kids were out in the street playing. And they saw me from about 50 yards away. And there was this great cry that went up. Grandpa! And they came racing towards me and threw themselves into my arms.

[19 : 22] And I deserve every part of that. I feel like we ought to say this about Jesus. Like, when he offers to put his wings over us, it's not a reluctant thing that we ought to slide under.

But we ought to throw ourselves there. And it's not making a small adjustment to my life, a little bit here, a little bit there, a nod to Jesus when I'm very busy. But it's recognizing how utterly vulnerable I am.

I'm a little chick. And I'm surrounded. And I'm perfect prey for every fox. And the world is full of foxes. There's only one place of true eternal safety.

That's Christ himself. And it's seeing him as the God of love. And it's surrendering to him as the king of love and living under the shadow of his wing in success and in failure.

And even though we constantly wander away and we find ourselves outside, we keep drawing back under the protection of his wings and guidance. And as we come today to celebrate the Lord's Supper, there's this lovely verse that I started my prayer with this morning, where Jesus says, Come to me, all who are laden and heavy laden, I will give you rest.

[20 : 38] Take my yoke from me and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in soul. And this is the Jesus who invites us to himself afresh today and every day.

So let's kneel and pray together. Let's kneel and pray together.