

Sermon: Living for others

Luke 13:22-35

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Can you help me a bit? In the bible we see Jesus do many different sorts of things. Can you mention a few?

[Some examples: He is calling disciples, withdrawing, praying, walking, having children on his lap; we see him knocking on a door, gathering crowds, climbing hills, he write in the sand with his finger, he shares bread, preaches, he cries.]

We see Jesus do many things. But we never see him run. Even when Jesus is warned that King Herod wants to kill him, Jesus does not run, even in the face of death. He actually confronted the danger. He confronted the fox.

1. Herod the Fox

Jesus calls the person who wanted to kill him, Herod, a fox. And a few verses later, we see that Jesus compares himself then, with a hen. Well, Foxes and hens do not mix well together.

You may not know much of farming, and I certainly am absolutely an ignorant city-boy. But we all know that the biggest enemy of farmers with chicken, are the foxes. Foxes love to sneak into the henhouse and to kill and steal. King Herod is such a fox, and our Lord Jesus is the hen.

I think the Gospel writer, Luke, very purposely put the words of Jesus about Herod being a fox, and the statement in which Jesus compares himself with a hen, into one paragraph.

The last part, where Jesus compares himself with a hen, was probably in reality spoken by Jesus a few weeks later, when he was already in Jerusalem. You can see this in the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 23.

Luke wanted to contrast the words of Jesus about being like a hen, with Jesus' calling Herod a fox. Let us try to understand what this contrast means.

This event we have read about occurred in Galilee. Galilee is what is now the northeastern part of Israel. That area was ruled by Herod; this was the son of the Herod who killed the babies in Bethlehem, 30 years earlier. Like father like son.

The Pharisees came to warn Jesus: 'Herod wants to kill you; you must leave his domain as soon as you can! Danger! Go to Judea, where Herod has no jurisdiction!'

Huh? Some Pharisees who try to save the life of Jesus? That seems to be a new concept. Some were actually quite okay – think of Nicodemus

who came to talk with Jesus. But most Pharisees were no friends of Jesus. Why did they try to get him out of Galilee and into Judea?

Maybe the Pharisees were worried about the impact of the preaching of Jesus in Galilee. Jesus had just held a major preaching campaign, and the interest in his message was great!

Jesus had just invited the crowds to believe in him; he spoke about how to be saved; he had warned the crowds that some Jews would be thrown out of the Kingdom of God, and that non-Jews would be invited into the Kingdom. Jesus warned that for many Jews, eternity will not be pleasant.

“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.” (Luke 13:28-30)

This was language the Pharisees *did not like*. They did not like the crowds to be attached to Jesus, and they certainly did not like his comment that some of “the first” will come last. They, the Pharisees were the first, according to their own religious calculations. They saw themselves as the special sweethearts of God – because they followed the whole shari3a of Israel!

So cunningly they suggested Jesus to leave Galilee. That would diminish his impact on the crowds. And beside that, the power of the Pharisees was much bigger in Judea, as that was the center of their religion. That was where they had their temple; that was where plans to kill Jesus were already being made.

Jesus tells those cunning Pharisees to go back to Herod with a message. Is Jesus suggesting they had actually come from him? Do we have to read the sentence with irony, something like: “You go back to your Herod”?

Anyway, the threat was real enough: the same Herod had not long before also killed John the Baptist. So Jesus gives a message to the Pharisees, to go back to ‘your’ Herod and ‘tell that fox’... This is not nice Sunday school language.

Jesus always shows respect for people, but in this case, he slams Herod. To call someone a fox is not kind. And Jesus made it even worse... He actually used the *female word* for fox, showing his

contempt for Herod. "That evil woman in his palace..."

Jesus showed no fear for Herod, he did not run... He only shows contempt. Be careful to not think that Jesus is always 'sweet'.

2 Jesus the Hen

The message of Jesus to Herod was:

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.' (Luke 13:32)

The words 'today, tomorrow and on the third day' were a well-known expression in the Hebrew language; they suggest a target-oriented approach. 'I do this, and this, and then I reach my goal.' Jesus underlined that he would reach his goal, and that Herod could not do anything about this.

In Luke 13:32 Jesus says, on the third day I will reach my goal. In the next verse, He says that his goal is to die in Jerusalem. 'I will reach my goal. I will die in Jerusalem.'

When Jesus says, "I will reach my goal", he uses the same word as when on the Cross He exclaims: 'It is finished. I have reached the goal.'

Jesus did not go to the cross as a victim but as the victor. He chose the time and the place; he made this very clear in his response to Herod. He did not run away from danger – he travelled straight to Jerusalem for adopting the gravest danger thinkable, death on a cross.

Not Herod or any other evil ruler sets the pace in the life of Jesus, but He had it all in his own hands. Jesus has nothing to be afraid of. He is mightier than any worldly ruler.

This is not only encouraging because He was able to save us by his death in Jerusalem. It also encourages me because it shows that God is in charge. The political Herods of this world are awful foxes, their friends the religious Pharisees are just as bad - but they do not have the last word!

God's plans cannot be stopped. Jesus is more powerful than the palace! And he is more powerful than the religious leaders. Is that not a great encouragement for us all!

So Jesus completed his mission. He reached his goals; He fulfilled God's salvation plans.

In this context Jesus does not speak of himself as the victorious lion; He prefers to speak of himself as a hen. That sounds quite strange... but in the context of his upcoming death in Jerusalem, this was not so strange.

Hens are wonderful animals. You may have seen sweet pictures of a hen covering its baby chicken under her wings. In a storm, or in rain,

hens cover their chicken, lovingly protecting them with their own life.

When the foxes come, as loving mothers they protect their little chicks: They fight and pick and bite... When you approach a mother hen with her chicken, they turn into savage animals! Sometimes hens are able to chase the foxes away, but more often, while defending their offspring, they die in the effort.

3 Two options

And here we have the contrast between Herod and Jesus. The political Herods of this world, and many religious leaders, walk over people for their own benefit; Jesus however protects people at his own expense. Herod kills; Jesus saves.

So here we have the two options in front of us. Whose party are we with? With Herod? Do we live to serve our own goals? If someone has hurt us, do we take revenge? Are we the people of power who will never allow anyone to walk over us? Do we misuse our power and position for pushing others down so that we go up?

Or are we on the side of Jesus, whose life was marked by living for others, even if that was painful for himself?

The shocking thing is that Jesus places the people of God, in Jerusalem, on the side of Herod. Herod is a killer, but Jerusalem is also a killer, Jesus says. It has chosen the side of power. The rulers of Israel have so often focused on their own might and wealth only. So when prophets came, who told them to walk in the ways of love, the ways of righteousness, the ways of Jesus, they were killed.

God send so many prophets to his own people, but many were killed. And now, finally, God has sent his Son to Jerusalem, hoping that his people would now, finally, listen to him. And the Son says:

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 13:34)

Jesus' words about Jerusalem are heart breaking. Here we see the mother heart, the father heart of God. Even though the people again and again rejected the word of God, Jesus had always wanted to gather the people in his arms, as a hen gathers her children under her wings.

Jesus wanted to protect the city from its own sins, and from the punishment of God that was coming. But the city chose to behave just as the evil Herod did: it wanted to kill Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God. Even God's final offer, even

God himself visiting the city did not make a difference.

Nothing hurts so much as to offer love to someone and have it rejected. It is life's bitterest tragedy to give one's heart to someone only to have it broken. That is what happened to Jesus in Jerusalem, and he still comes to this world, and still so many men reject him. He comes to us and he asks us to accept his love...

Some people are so impressed by the love of God that they find it hard to believe that God can also punish, eternally punish. But Jesus himself makes clear that God's love does not eradicate his justice. People who not willingly hide under the love of God, under the wings of his Son, have to face the show of his justice. And from his justice, no one can escape – except if we hide under the safe wings of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

To Jerusalem Jesus said: "your house is left to you desolate; you were not willing."

The house of Israel, Jerusalem and its temple, were abandoned by God's presence and blessings. And God's evacuation of the city soon led to its destruction. In the year 70 these words were fulfilled, when Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed.

God did not destroy Jerusalem. He just withdrew his presence. When God is no longer present, all things collapse.

This is what hell will be like. A state of complete Godlessness. The absence of God is the

worst thing imaginable. The one who created love, joy and peace, if he is not around, our love, joy and peace will soon completely disappear.

Conclusion

So like Jerusalem so many years ago, we stand before the choice. Is Herod our model for life? Using the elbows, walking over people, playing power games? Using people to reach our own goals?

Or is Jesus our model? The one who lived for God, who existed for others, and who was eventually welcomed back into the throne of God?

Nothing is safer than fully choosing the side of our Lord Jesus and living under his protection. And that safety also gives us the power, to take a clear stand for people and against the powers that oppress them. It makes us people who do not fear today, or tomorrow, and people who do not fear whosoever lives in the palace.

Jesus invites us to follow him. That begins by the decision to live under his protective wings; he protects from sin, from punishment, from demons; He protect from curses, from fear of people, even from fear of bad rulers. He protects us from anything that may hurt our soul and our eternal destiny because he gathers us in his arms as a hen gather her chicken under her wings.

Amen