

Luke 13:31-35

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[0 : 00] This morning we were reflecting on what Jesus had to say about his house, and we noted in passing the significance that he was on his way to Jerusalem when he had this encounter with the man who asked him, Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?

And then he took the opportunity on the back of that question to explore and to instruct on the matter of the kingdom of God and how we are to enter into that kingdom pictured as a house. So he was on his way to Jerusalem when this occurred, and we made mention of the fact that, of course, he was on his way to Jerusalem to die, and by his death opened the door to his house for all who would trust in him.

And the passage that we've read this evening, and we'll be giving some thought to this evening, records what happened immediately after Jesus had urged his listeners to make every effort to enter through the narrow door.

Luke is careful to make that clear with the time reference at the beginning of verse 31. Notice there at the beginning of the passage we read, Luke says, at that time.

[1 : 25] Some translations capture the sense with the expression, at that very time. The idea is for the reader to be clear that what is to be recorded happened immediately following what we have just read.

That's not always the case in the Gospels. They don't always follow a strict chronological order, but that is what is happening on this occasion.

So I want to look at these verses, verses 31 to 35, and I want to do so from a particular angle, namely the portrait that is painted of Jesus by his words and actions that are recorded in these verses.

What do his words and actions tell us about who he is and what he is like? And as we discover by means of listening to his words and observing his actions, as we discover what he is like, who he is and what he is like, we are always to be mindful of something that we're maybe very conscious of and very aware of, but it's good to be reminded of, that what we discover to be true of Jesus as he walked through the villages of Galilee heading to Jerusalem, what we discover to be true of him then remains true of him.

He is the same. He is the great unchanging one. So we're just going to follow the tracks of Jesus through these verses and draw out truth that together begin to paint a portrait.

[2 : 58] So let's just do that. And what's the first thing that I am struck by as I read through these verses? And I think the first thing that strikes me is what we might call his security.

Now, what do I mean by that? Well, let's read verses 31 and 32 and see what happens there at the very beginning of this passage. We read, Now, Herod was a nasty piece of work.

The Herod that is being referred to here in this passage is Herod Antipas. So he was the son of Herod the Great, infamous because of his order to kill all the infants under two years of age at the time of Jesus' birth.

So this Herod was Herod the Great's son. When Herod the Great died, his dominion, a dominion that he didn't have, of course, absolute control over. He was under the control of Rome himself. But nonetheless, the dominion that he had was divided between his four sons. And Herod Antipas, who is made reference to here or who is spoken of here, was given the provinces of Galilee and Perea.

[4 : 30] He was just 17 at the time that his father died. Now, it's difficult to know as we read this verse and the threat that the Pharisees communicate to Jesus.

It's difficult to know what exactly is going on. Herod was quite capable of arranging for the death of Jesus or threatening to kill Jesus. But maybe it's less clear why he would have been of a mind to do

so.

And some have suggested that this was fake news. It's not just a modern phenomenon. Fake news, the authors of which were the Pharisees themselves who were communicating what some suggest may have been fake news.

Maybe just something they'd made up to scare Jesus and hopefully get him from under their feet. He was an unwelcome presence.

And if they could scare him away, then perhaps this was something they were trying to do. Another question that arises when we read what happens here or what's recorded as happening here is, you know, people ask, well, why would the Pharisees have been concerned about Jesus' safety? [5 : 39] Why would they have told him? Even if this was indeed a genuine threat, why would they have told him about it? And really what we have is more questions than answers. But whatever the truth of the matter, what is clear is that Jesus is confronted by enemies who are seeking to do him harm.

Be that Herod, be it the Pharisees, he is in some ways surrounded by, shadowed by those who oppose him and those who seek to do him harm.

And the question is, and this leads us to this description or this sense of identifying his security. The question is, how does Jesus respond? Well, he responds to these threats with complete security. He gives no indication of fear or anxiety, quite the reverse.

He boldly challenges the one seemingly seeking his harm in very contemptuous language. Very unusual, really, to hear Jesus speak in such contemptuous terms of somebody.

[6 : 45] And yet that is what we read. He replied, go tell that fox. Go tell that king who thinks himself so powerful. Go tell him that I will do as I please.

I will do what I have determined to do and he will not in any way alter my plans. As we witness one who enjoys this complete security.

I can't imagine that many folks would have spoken, at least out loud in public, in the terms that Jesus spoke about Herod.

but for Jesus no doubt or I wonder if the thought went through his mind well your father didn't manage to kill me and you're certainly not going to prove any more successful. Jesus is secure because he is in control. Now when we witness the security of Jesus in the face of these circumstances and we think of ourselves we may not face the same threat that Jesus faced but I do find it comforting to know that this same Jesus has promised to be with me has promised to be with his people to the very end of the age so whatever challenges or threats or danger we might face we do so accompanied by and protected by this Jesus who we witness and and see before us here. But another thing that strikes me about Jesus as we build up this portrait of him is what we might call his focus. Reading again verse 32 he replied to these Pharisees go tell that fox

I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow and on the third day I will reach my goal. Jesus clearly has important matters to be getting on with which revolve around helping people driving out demons healing the sick. For Jesus this is important business and that's all the more striking given that in Jesus's own mind he was very clear that a far greater task was imminent.

[8 : 57] He was heading to Jerusalem to die on the cross and you can imagine how that could have really been such a central focus to his activities that these other tasks might have fallen to the wayside.

But no he had these important matters to deal with to help those who were oppressed and those who were in pain and those who were sick. And he won't be distracted by idol or even by real threats.

That focus is striking and challenging. When we think of ourselves we're so easily distracted and lose focus on the task that God has given us to do to help other people to show kindness to serve those God places in our path.

And would that we could know something of that that focus of Jesus in the task that he has given to us. But the focus is especially evident in the language that Jesus employs when he says and on the third day I will reach my goal.

Now it's not at all clear what Jesus means when he says by the third day. This is some kind of specific time reference or it's just some general time reference.

[10 : 13] To be honest that isn't very clear. Certainly not clear in my mind. But what is clear is his unshakable conviction that he will reach his goal.

That is very clear in terms of the language that he uses. On the third day I will reach my goal. And again there what you witness is this great and clear focus of Jesus on the task to hand.

In the same gospel of Luke in chapter 9 we're told how Jesus set his face to Jerusalem and to Jerusalem he must go.

And so in the reply that he entrusts the Pharisees to take back to Herod that in itself is curious. Why would they? It almost suggests that they had brought the threat from Herod.

Now they have to go back with a message for Herod. But leaving that aside what is clear is that Jesus is focused on what he has to do and where he has to go.

[11 : 19] And that leads me on to another aspect of this portrait of Jesus that I find in these verses. And that is his sense of mission. It is very similar to this focus that we witness but perhaps developing it a little bit by reading verse 33.

Notice what Jesus goes on to say in verse 33. He says, In any case I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem.

Now the language that I particularly want to draw to your attention is this language of I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day.

I must keep going. The must there that bears a heavy weight of meaning. It speaks of divine compulsion.

This is the father's plan. This is the father's route map. This is the father's timetable. And Jesus must do his father's will. It was his delight to do his father's will.

[12 : 21] This is something that he must do. He knows what he has to do. He has been given instructions as to what he has to do. And he must do it. And nothing will distract him.

You know, we remember even to his own disciples, the language he would use, very strong language when there was an attempt, albeit unwittingly, to veer him off track.

Get behind me, Satan. Why? Because he knew what he had to do. He knew where he had to be. He knew where he was going. I must do this. I must go where I have been instructed to go.

So, there's this sense of divine compulsion and tied in with that and similar to that, the language speaks of determined resolve. The sense really of what Jesus says there in verse 13 when he says, I must keep going today and tomorrow.

The sense is along the lines of, I must and I will. So, it's not just, I know this is what I must do, but it's also, and I am going to do it. And nothing will distract me from what I must do.

[13 : 28] So, we see here this real sense of mission that drives him and directs him in his ministry. The next thing that I want to notice as we just make our way through the passage is what I'm calling his self-awareness.

This is maybe less obvious and we need to think about it a little bit more carefully. Let me just read the verses from which I'll draw out what leads me to speak in these terms of his self-awareness.

In verse 33, in the second half of the verse, Jesus says, For surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem. And then he goes on to say these very familiar words, O 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.

But you were not willing. I think in these words, in the second half of verse 33 and then in verse 34, we can see in two ways Jesus' self-awareness.

I think in an increasing order of significance. First of all, we have this intriguing reference that Jesus makes to prophets not dying outside Jerusalem.

[14 : 47] For surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem. Now, the immediate difficulty with that statement of Jesus is that plenty prophets did die outside Jerusalem. And so immediately you say, well, what does this mean?

You know, the Bible itself records the death of many prophets that did not take place in Jerusalem. So what is it that Jesus is saying by using this language?

How are we to understand it? I think it points to the reality that Jesus knew very well that he was not just any prophet. He was God's ultimate prophet.

He was the Word made flesh. And Jerusalem was his city. You think of the words of Psalm 48, where Jerusalem is described as the city of the great king.

And Jesus had that self-awareness that he was the great king. If he was to die, and he surely was to die, he would die in the city where God chose to manifest his presence and redeeming work in a very special way.

[15 : 54] And so there is this self-awareness of Jesus, even in this rather intriguing reference that he makes concerning the location of his death. But secondly, and much more significantly, I think, we have the manner in which Jesus compares himself to a mother hen gathering her chicks for protection.

This is maybe what's most familiar from this passage. And when we think about the picture, when we're confronted with the picture, when we read the verses, I think what first strikes us, and maybe that's as it should be, what first strikes us is what it tells us about the tender love of Jesus. And we'll come to that in a moment. But before we come to thinking about what that picture tells us about the tender love of Jesus, what I want to suggest is what the language reveals concerning who Jesus considers himself and knows himself to be.

The language reveals his self-awareness as the incarnate Son of God. Why so? Well, this picture that Jesus employs is often found in the Old Testament.

On many occasions, we don't have time to go through all the occasions. Maybe just read a couple of the examples. But on many occasions, you have this picture.

[17 : 12] And the picture is invariably of God's wings protecting his people, of his people finding refuge under his wings.

Perhaps one of the most beautiful references that we have in that regard is in the book of Ruth. And in Ruth chapter 2 and in verse 12. So in Ruth chapter 2 and in verse 12. We were confronted with this picture of God and his everlasting wings.

And Ruth is escaping me at the moment. But that's what happens with very little books of the Bible. But here we go. Let me just find Ruth. So here we go. In Ruth chapter 2 and verse 12.

We read as follows. This is Boaz. And he's speaking of the Lord. And he says, 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.

[18 : 22] And then in the book of Psalms, on a number of occasions, you have the same language employed. And invariably it is employed describing God. In Psalm 17 and in verse 8, to give another example.

Keep me as the apple of your eye. Hide me in the shadow of your wings. In Psalm 36 and in verse 7 of that psalm. What do we read? How priceless is your unfailing love.

Both high and low among men. Find refuge in the shadow of your wings. And I could go on. And the point is that on all of these occasions, this language is employed to describe God.

Sometimes by God to describe himself. Or by the writer of the psalm to describe and speak of God. And this language, describing God in this way, was of course very familiar to those who would have been listening to Jesus.

So when Jesus uses that picture, and this is the point. When he uses that picture, that familiar Old Testament picture of himself, there is there an implicit claim to divinity.

[19 : 27] Now, I'm not for a moment saying that if this was the only evidence we had, that we could come to the conclusion, ah yes, Jesus is claiming to be God. But when we see this in the context of all the other pieces of evidence, then I think we can reasonably see this as part of this picture that reveals Jesus' own self-awareness.

And so he takes these pictures, employed of God, to describe himself. And so you see here his self-awareness. But let's move on to the other part of the portrait.

And thinking of that same verse. And that is what it says of his tender, saving love. Because the picture, as well as revealing to us Jesus' divine self-identity, also, of course, speaks of his tender and saving love.

We're struck, as we read the verse, by his longing to save. Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have longed to gather your children together.

There is a longing to save. We're struck by his ability to save. It's implicit that he has the power and the capacity to save.

[20 : 42] We're struck by his willingness to die that he might save. And the picture is of this mother hen willing to take the blow in protection of her chicks, to sacrifice herself that her chicks might be spared.

And when we read the language of Jesus, you might almost sense a tone of frustration. How often I have longed to gather your children together, but you were not willing.

We might be left wondering, well, was Jesus ultimately frustrated in this desire to save his children, to provide protection for his own? And, of course, we know that ultimately he was not frustrated in his longing to save.

Though the good citizens of Jerusalem were unwilling, Jesus, regardless, takes the blow that saves his own. He saves the unwilling. He provides protection for the unwilling.

And so, in the picture here, we have this portrait of a Savior whose love is tender and powerful to save. But let me just say one further thing as we come to the end of the passage.

[21 : 56] One other aspect of this portrait, and that's what we might call Jesus' prophetic insight. We've moved on to verse 35, the final verse, and let's just read what that says.

Look, your house is left to you desolate, I tell you. You will not, sorry. Look, 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.

Jesus here in this verse looks beyond his immediate mission in Jerusalem to what will follow. Now, there isn't a consensus as to what occasion Jesus is anticipating in this verse when he quotes from Psalm 118 and says that this will happen.

You know, you will not see me again until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And the obvious question that emerges is, well, when would that be? You know, when would Jesus be addressed in that way?

What occasion does Jesus have in mind? What occasion is he anticipating? There's maybe a couple of possibilities, and maybe it's difficult to definitively choose between them.

[23 : 03] One possibility that many suggest is that he is anticipating and looking forward to his return in glory. And yet, if that is the occasion that Jesus has in mind, and it's possible, it would require that those who rejected him, who he is addressing, would on that occasion receive him gladly.

The words taken from Psalm 118 are words of worship. So, it's possible that that is what Jesus is anticipating, but there is that, I suppose, difficulty we might say.

Another possibility that's been suggested, and I'm not stating that this is what Jesus has in mind, because to be honest, I don't altogether know. But another possibility that is suggested is that Jesus is anticipating that time when those who rejected him, his own people, the citizens of Zion who are rejecting him, who are not willing.

He's anticipating a time when they would, in due course, acknowledge him and receive him. And we know as we make our way through the New Testament, particularly when we turn to Paul and his letter to the Romans, and very especially all that he says in chapter 11 about this anticipated ingathering of God's ancient people that Paul discusses and instructs concerning there in that chapter, chapter 11.

And perhaps Jesus has in mind that day when those who now reject him will receive him warmly and cry out in joy and in worship, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

[24 : 47] Now, this evening is not the occasion to enter into all that could be said about Romans chapter 11, but we just remind ourselves of what Paul says in part of that chapter that would tie in with what's being suggested in Romans chapter 11, verses 11 and 12.

Listen to what Paul says. Again, I ask, and he's speaking about the Jewish people. Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all. Rather, because of their transgression, salvation will come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

For if their transgression means riches for the world and their loss means riches for the Gentiles, how much greater riches will their fullness bring? And in this chapter, he goes on to discuss this matter.

But the idea is that, yes, God's ancient people have rejected Jesus largely, but there is a day coming when many will acknowledge him, many will receive him.

And perhaps this is what Jesus has in mind when he addresses those rejecting him and says, I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

[25 : 58] Well, regardless how we understand how these words or when these words and what occasion these words will be fulfilled, regardless of that, the point is that Jesus enjoys this prophetic insight.

He knows all that will come to pass. And he knows all that will come to pass because he holds in his hands all that will come to pass.

And that in itself, of course, reveals much about who he is and what he is like. So as we've made our way through these verses, we're given this portrait or different aspects that together form a portrait of Jesus, as the one who demonstrates complete security in the face of danger and threat, the one who is altogether focused and resolved with a clear sense of mission, of divine compulsion, of determined resolve to do his Father's will, to fulfill his mission on our behalf.

We see perhaps more intriguingly this self-awareness of who he is, the king of Zion, the God under whose tender wings his people are protected.

We're given a beautiful insight into that tender, saving love. And we see something of this man who can look into the future and determine and declare what will happen because he is the one who holds the future in his own hands.

[27 : 33] Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you for your son. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you for who he is. And we thank you for all that he has done. And we thank you for your people.

We are those who enjoy his company and his protection. We are those who are spoken of and who are in him. And we thank you for that.

We pray that we would know him evermore, that we would have an ever greater and deeper and richer understanding of who he is and an ever greater desire to be like him.

And we pray these things in his name. Amen.