

“Love Leads Jesus to Jerusalem”

Sometimes it's good that we don't know the future. People want to know their futures, don't they? They want to know them so much that they even turn to worthless things like horoscopes and fortune tellers to try to figure them out. But God has made it very clear to us that only he knows the future, and that generally speaking he has not chosen to reveal it to us.

I mention this because I wonder how our choices might change if we could look into our future and see the real effect that those choices would have. Would you have chosen as a student the major or program of study that you did if you would have known at the time exactly how difficult it would be? Would a firefighter or police officer rush into a situation if they knew for certain it would mean not just danger, but death for them?

Suppose God did allow us a bit of information about our future. Suppose he told you that you would die not here in Tucson, but in Phoenix. How hard would you work to avoid the place? How desperate would you be to avoid the future that you had been given?

Certainly none of these hypothetical situations quite captures for us the situation facing Jesus in our sermon text today. And yet, they may help us to consider the depth of our Savior's love. It is our desire to avoid difficult situations. We do want to steer clear of dangerous circumstances. But we might be willing to face them if we have a strong enough reason to do so. Students may choose a difficult path through school because when they're through they will be able to help others in a way that they enjoy while making a decent living. Public servants may be willing to put their lives in danger because they want to keep others safe and feel good about their contributions to society. And we might just force ourselves to go into Phoenix if there was something important there that we want to be a part of.

But there's only one reason that Jesus set out with his disciples to go to Jerusalem. There is only one reason that he defied any who wished to stop him. And that reason is love. Jesus loved the world and loves the world with a love so deep that even though he knew exactly how dangerous and painful his mission would be, he resolutely determined to carry it out. Love led Jesus to Jerusalem for one final time in his life, and our sermon text today shares with us a glimpse of that love. As Jesus himself said, **“In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!”**

Jesus said these things in response to some Pharisees who had warned him that Herod wanted to kill him. Herod ruled over Galilee and other regions in the northern part of the Promised Land. The Bible doesn't share any more information about why Herod wanted to kill Jesus. In fact, from what we know of the Pharisees, we might wonder why they were the ones bringing a warning to Jesus. Most Pharisees that we meet on the pages of Scripture are Jesus' enemies, not his friends. Some have concluded because of this that the Pharisees wanted Jesus to go to Jerusalem because there in a more Jewish area they would have more influence. And, on the other hand, Jesus would not be as popular as he was in Galilee, where he did so much of his teaching and preaching.

But Herod wouldn't scare Jesus, nor would the Pharisees reporting about him. Jesus knew what his work was, and he was going to do it. If the Pharisees cared to report back to Herod, they could tell him that Jesus wouldn't listen to his sly and cunning ways. Meanwhile, Jesus would do what he had been doing all along. **He replied, “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 would continue driving out demons. He would continue healing people. He would continue helping people until the time came to complete his work.

Here we again see clearly that Jesus is true God with power over demons and disease. And he was using that power as he always did, to show love to others.

And that same love would take Jesus to the great city of Jerusalem. And when he got there, he knew what awaited him. Just as God's prophets had long been persecuted and killed in the capital of Israel and Judea, so Jesus would be killed in Jerusalem. He knew when it would happen. He knew how it would happen. But he didn't hesitate. He would reach the goal.

The goal of Jesus' entire life and work was to take away the sins of the world by his death on the cross. So great was his love that he left his heavenly throne to walk the road to his death in Jerusalem.

And his amazing love for us shows us how lacking our love is, both for God and for others. Sure, we can conceive of times that we or others might put their own lives on the line for someone else, and especially for someone that is close to us. But that's not really who we are, deep down inside, is it? That's not who we are by nature. We naturally are inclined to do what helps us, or what is comfortable, or what is easy and fun for us. But do we make up our minds to do what is hard and painful and deadly for the sake of others who don't deserve it? Jesus did. He did it for us. Our loveless-ness was laid on him and in love he died to take it away. His love knew the final outcome, and yet that love for us led him to Jerusalem.

And that same love led him to mourn for the city to which he would go. The great city of Jerusalem had long enjoyed so many specific blessings from God. Within its walls stood his Temple, the place where he had promised to dwell with his people. For ages God's prophets had shared God's word with the people of Jerusalem. And Jesus himself had walked the streets of the holy city before. And yet both in the centuries before and in the time of Christ, so many in Jerusalem were unwilling to listen to God's word. They were unwilling to receive God's prophets. Instead they stoned and killed them.

And they would execute Jesus when he arrived.

The fault was not with Jesus. He longed to bless the people of Jerusalem. God had often reached out to them. He wanted to shelter them like a bird shelters its young. But the people were not willing. Such a tragedy that even though Jesus himself would come to them, they would insist on rejecting him.

And such a tragedy when anyone does the same even today. It caused Jesus to mourn to think about the fate of these people. And it ought to cause us to do the same. By no merit or worthiness of our own, due only to his love for us, God has called us to faith. He has united us to Jesus Christ and to his death. The mourning words of our Savior remind us to never take such a blessing for granted, but to guard it and keep it through the means of grace that he has given to us. Let us hear his word faithfully and let us receive the sacrament of Christ's body and blood thankfully and often.

And let us recognize in the sinful world around us not a hindrance to our way of life or an obstacle to be overcome. But let us see in the sinful people all around us objects of Christ's love. Let us mourn with Jesus for those who reject him, and let us go with Jesus to places where we find those who don't know him—to our friends and family members who don't know his love as we do, and to those in our neighborhoods and workplaces who need what we have.

The Lord spoke of the house of Jerusalem being left desolate. Certainly it is not out of place to consider the destruction of Jerusalem within several decades of Christ speaking these words. But his prophecies really speak to a deeper point, the point that only those who receive him in faith receive the blessings he brings. These are the ones who see him as Savior and say, **"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."**

It is interesting perhaps to think what we might do differently if we knew the future. But in the end, what matters is this: we know that our future is secure because one who knew what the future held for him loved us enough to press on to that end. To him be all praise and glory.

Sermon Text: Luke 13:31–35 (NIV84)

<sup>31</sup> At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, “Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.”

<sup>32</sup> He replied, “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.’” <sup>33</sup> In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!

<sup>34</sup> “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!” <sup>35</sup> 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.’”