

LUKE 13:31–35. (EHV)

In that very hour, some Pharisees came to him and said, “Leave, and go away from here, because Herod wants to kill you.” He said to them, “Go tell that fox, ‘Look, I am going to drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal. Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the next day, because it cannot be that a prophet would be killed outside Jerusalem!’ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I have wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you will say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

Have you ever had to put on a tough face, while underneath your heart was breaking and bleeding? This is often the case when difficult conversations need to happen—when a Christian head of human resources needs to let someone go, when a Christian parent needs to administer discipline to a child, when a Christian friend or relative needs to confront their friend or relative about some sin they’re not taking seriously. There often needs to be a tough face to communicate the seriousness of the situation, but if you really love the person you’re talking to, the heart is breaking and bleeding underneath. You would prefer to be having almost any other conversation, but you know that this is the one you need to be having.

Jesus had those moments too. He has one of them here.

Jesus had just been talking about making every effort to enter through the narrow door to eternal life, the door that comparatively few people find. And while he was talking about that, some Pharisees came to him and said, “Leave, and go away from here, because Herod wants to kill you.” Herod Antipas was the ruler of Galilee and he had likely already put John the Baptist to death for preaching against him. It would not at all be surprising if Herod did want to kill Jesus, since Jesus was also preaching repentance and had a following wherever he went, just like John did. But it seems unlikely that these Pharisees were actually serving as spokesmen for Herod. These Pharisees were probably just trying to use the reports they had heard to their own advantage. Sharing this information with Jesus would make it look like they were concerned about Jesus, but they were hoping against hope that those reports would also cause Jesus to leave their region, out of concern for his own life, and thereby also stop making his influence felt in their region.

Jesus’s answer is interesting, and Bible interpreters wrestle with what he actually meant by it. Clearly Jesus was not intimidated by Herod, since he tells the Pharisees to “go tell that fox” what he tells them. But when he tells them, “Look, I am going to drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal,” what does he mean? There are a couple different options. Luke does tell us earlier that Jesus was making his way to Jerusalem for the final time, so it might mean that Jesus was going to drive out demons and heal people that day and the next and then reach Jerusalem on the third day. Jesus does then talk about Jerusalem, so that would seem to fit. The difficulty is that there seem to be more than three days between when Jesus says these words and when he arrives in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

But Jesus's words could also mean that he'll be finished in the area governed by Herod on the third day. You could paraphrase Jesus's words to them and Herod, "Look, I'm going to drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow and on the third day I'll be finished in this region. But if you think Herod is going to kill me before then, you're wrong, because it is necessary for me to keep doing my work the next three days, because Jerusalem is where I'm going to die, not here."

But however you interpret Jesus's words, a couple things are clear. First, Jesus is on a divine timetable, and he's going to follow that timetable, not the timetable Herod or the Pharisees want him to follow. Second, Jesus cannot be intimidated with threats on his life. He is going to be leaving the region, but not so that he can avoid being killed by Herod, but precisely so that his life can be taken in Jerusalem!

Think of how these words would have sounded to the Pharisees who had come to Jesus. Essentially: "Herod isn't a danger to the prophets. Jerusalem is. The hotbed of you Pharisees is the danger zone for the prophets. That's where prophets get put to death."

But if you think Jesus is just being mean to the Pharisees and to Jerusalem, listen to what he says next: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I have wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you will say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

Two things are clear here: One one hand, Jesus loves Jerusalem dearly. He has had a burning desire to gather the residents of the city together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. He loves the people there, and he wants them to be in heaven with him.

On the other hand, Jesus is warning these Pharisees and Jerusalem that heaven is not the eternal destination for most of them. They are going to kill Jesus. They are going to kill his followers. The city itself is going to be destroyed in 70 AD. And when Jesus says they won't see him until the time comes when they say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!", he isn't talking about Palm Sunday. If that's what he was saying, it wouldn't have any punch: "I tell you, you're not going to see me until a short time from now when you see me." No, Jesus is talking about Judgment Day, when everyone will acknowledge Jesus's blessedness as the Lord, but most will acknowledge it to their shame and destruction, as those who didn't acknowledge it until it was too late.

It's a tough face on a breaking heart.

If you've ever wondered, "Why does Jeremiah, why do the other prophets, get themselves into these situations with people where their lives are in danger from them? Why does Jesus say these harsh things to some people that just get their feathers even more ruffled? Why do pastors and teachers still today get themselves on some people's bad side?"—here's the answer: They love them. God's word is true, and for those who don't believe the truth and follow the truth, Judgment Day is going to be a very tragic day. So they have to warn people, like Paul does in Galatians 5: "Now the works of the sinful flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, complete lack of restraint, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, discord, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, orgies, and things similar to these. I

warn you, just as I also warned you before, that those who continue to do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

And if you’ve ever wondered, “*How* do I confront people who are stuck in sin without repentance and who won’t listen to the word of God?”—the answer to that question is here too. It’s not just about being right. It’s not just about saying the right thing to them. It’s not about looking down on them. Your heart needs to bleed and break for them. If you can’t yet say to the person you need to confront that you long for them to be gathered with you under the spiritual safety of Christ’s wings, then you’re not ready. And if you’re not ready, it’s probably because you still don’t fully grasp that that’s the same love Christ showed you.

The same love Christ shows here. After all, why is Jesus going to die in Jerusalem? Why is he determined to die there? Just to show how evil Jerusalem is? No, he’s going to die in Jerusalem, he is determined to die in Jerusalem, to pay for the sins of Jerusalem, to pay for the sins of prophet-murderers, to pay for the sins of the stubborn Pharisees, to pay for the sins of that fox Herod Antipas, to pay for the sins of the demon-possessed and sick people he was going to be healing the next few days, to pay for the sins of those who are silent when they ought to say something, to pay for the sins of those who love to confront others in their own self-righteousness, to pay for the sins of you and me, even though we did not yet know him and thus did not yet love him.

And he isn’t just determined to die in Jerusalem, but to be dead on that day and the next day and on the third day to reach his goal. Eternal life. Eternal victory over death—for himself and for all humankind.

This is a tough face on a breaking heart—a heart that breaks even, yes, especially for his enemies. May God grant us and many others to see this breaking heart, this heart of profound and eternal love, for what it is, so that when Judgment Day comes, we may not say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,” as those for whom it is too late, but as those who already knew how blessed and holy he was and were longing for his return. Amen.