

Rev. Gregory Gibbons
Lola Park Lutheran Church
Redford, MI 48239

Luke 13:31-35

HOW COULD JESUS LOVE PEOPLE LIKE THAT?

INI

Can we all agree on something? Can we agree that there are people out there that are very hard to love? We can call them unlovable. We can even say that they are unlikable. They are rude and crude and selfish. They don't care about anyone but themselves. They do whatever they have to do to get their own way and they don't care if you get hurt in the process. They lie, they cheat, they steal, they do anything that it takes to get what they want. It is very hard to love such people. We haven't even gotten to people like murderers, rapists, and robbers. Can we agree that people like that aren't really lovable?

How could Jesus love the people of Jerusalem? How could he love people who would rather let a condemned murderer walk the streets than him? How could he love people that demanded his death? How could he love people who after seeing him with a crown of thorns on his head and a body bleeding from lashes from a Roman whip and bruises to his face from many punches could only shout out, "Crucify him!" How could he love people who spit in his face and called him every vile and disgusting name they could think of? How could he love people who cheered the Roman soldiers driving nails into his hands and feet and hoisting him up on a cross? How could he say, "Father, forgive them because they don't know what they are doing?" HOW COULD JESUS LOVE PEOPLE LIKE THAT?

There are a lot of people out there who have a very weird definition of "love." They think that it means giving people whatever they want. They think it means never saying "no" to a person because that would hurt their feelings. Anyone who has ever been a parent knows that if you truly love your child, you have to tell them what is right and what is wrong. You have to say "no" not merely occasionally, but multiple times each and every day. You tell them not to talk to strangers. You tell them that you want to know where they are going and when they intend to be home. You tell them that they will be home at a certain time. You tell them that they are not to drink alcohol or do drugs or smoke. You tell them that sex is reserved for marriage and marriage only. You have rules for young children and teenagers. There are times when children don't want to hear what their parents have to say. They may even tell their parents that they hate them and wish that they had different parents. They want to hurt their parents by their words and actions, and they do! But their parents still love them. They show their love by saying "no!"

It isn't merely parents who have to tell people "No!" Pastors and teachers, prophets and apostles have had the same task from God throughout the ages and it doesn't always look pretty. Our Old Testament reading centers on the prophet Jeremiah. He was God's prophet who told the people that the Temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Babylonians and the people would be carried off into exile. As you could imagine it was not a popular message and the people wanted to kill Jeremiah. The apostle Paul tearfully spoke of the enemies of Christ. They live their lives in sinful pleasure and love it. "Their destiny is destruction; their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame." They are headed straight to hell, and they could care less. Paul would be threatened with death over and over again throughout his ministry.

And then you have our Lord Jesus grieving over the city of Jerusalem, the holy city, which was anything but holy. The city was known for rejecting and killing God's prophets and they were proud of it. They wore it like a badge of

honor. They would put another notch on their city gun belt. "Killed another one!" They might even see their greatest triumph yet as having killed the very Son of God. And yet Jesus would still love these people with a love that they certainly did not deserve. He would warn them because their time of grace would end soon.

St. Luke speaks of Jesus' journey. "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem." Jesus had a goal, and he was not going to be deterred from it. He was going to Jerusalem, and he was going there to die. He was going there to fulfill the Passover by being the Lamb of God who was slain for the sin of the world. This was God's plan of salvation for the human race. Jesus would die and then he would rise from the dead, destroying the power of death forever.

We find something that we might think was strange. I'm sure the apostles did too. As Jesus was preaching and teaching in Perea, some Pharisees came to Jesus and warned him to leave because King Herod wanted to kill him. Now this was not the Herod who wanted to kill Jesus as a little baby. That was this man's evil father. This was Herod Antipas, his son who ruled Galilee and Perea. Now this Herod had showed that he was capable of cold-blooded murder when he had John the Baptist beheaded at a dinner party. He received a lot of flak for that and rightfully so. The people regarded John as a prophet sent from God. Did Herod really want the blood of another prophet on his hands? Jesus would later be brought to Herod on Good Friday. Herod wasn't going to have anything to do with Jesus' death. He only wanted to see a miracle or two.

So, what did the Pharisees have in mind? We know that they were planning to kill Jesus themselves. Did they simply want to get Jesus out of Perea where his popularity was still strong? Did they want to lull Jesus into a false sense of security? Did they want him to believe that they were now his friends? Did they want to discredit him? Did they want to get him to Jerusalem sooner where he could die sooner? It could be any or all those things.

Jesus was not afraid of the Pharisees, and he wasn't afraid of Herod either. He was going to do what he had to do. "I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal. In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem." Jesus would show the gracious power that he had as the Son of God as he would heal people of various diseases and drive out demons. People would see that he was indeed the Messiah promised in the Scriptures and revealed to the world. Everything would soon be coming to a climax. He would suffer and die, and the goal would be reached "on the third day." That would be the ultimate show of his authority. He would be buried in the tomb with his Father's wrath against sin, but only Jesus would come out of that tomb. He would rise from the dead and bring life to the world.

But that was not going to happen in Perea. There was only one place where it could happen. It could only happen in Jerusalem because that is where God's prophets went to die. This links Jesus with all the Old Testament prophets who had come before him. Jesus was the Prophet who was foretold, the Prophet greater than Moses, to whom the people must listen. If Jesus was the Prophet, then there could be only one place where he could die and that was Jerusalem.

It is interesting as we study the Gospels that Jerusalem was the hotbed of hatred for our Lord from the very beginning. The Pharisees and teachers of the law immediately challenged Jesus' authority to drive the moneychangers out of the Temple courts. Nicodemus came to Jesus at night, probably out of fear to be seen with our Lord. We see very early in the Gospel of John the desire of the people of Jerusalem to kill Jesus. Jesus was welcomed in some cities, driven out in others, but Jerusalem was consistent. They wanted him dead from the beginning. And it was the religious leaders who were leading the charge!

Listen to our Lord's words of love for the city: "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!" Jesus would repeat these words with tears as he taught in the temple courts shortly before he died. Jerusalem means "city of peace." We know that Jesus lived up to the meaning of his name which was "Savior." Jerusalem was anything but a city of peace. God would send his messengers to the people over the centuries and his prophets lay dead in the streets. Zechariah was stoned to death in the temple courtyard. Isaiah was sawed in half by King Manasseh. Jeremiah was stoned to death. John the Baptist was beheaded. And we know what would happen to Jesus. And it would continue after Jesus died and rose again. Stephen was stoned to death. The apostles were persecuted and forced to flee. And the people continued to rejoice. That was their pride in killing all of God's prophets.

Yet Jesus still loved these people. He would give them warning after warning. He compared his efforts to that of a mother hen who would give up her life protecting her chicks from an attack of a hawk. He wanted these people to be his very own, to believe the promises given to Adam and to Abraham, to be the nation that was called out of Egypt and brought to the Promised Land. But these people wouldn't listen. They would rejoice as Pontius Pilate signed the death warrant to crucify him. They would rejoice as every nail was firmly pounded into his hands and feet.

Jesus would warn them. He would pray for them. But they were responsible for their evil actions. We may have sad and similar experiences with a friend or family member who will not turn from a destructive behavior. They get involved with alcohol abuse, drugs, a sexual lifestyle, hanging around with the wrong kind of people or other destructive behavior. They will not listen to us. They make their choice, and it is the wrong one. Their life will come to a tragic end.

History would repeat itself. The temple of Jeremiah's day would be destroyed. It would be like Shiloh which once housed the Ark of the Covenant. The rebuilt Temple would be destroyed forty years later by the Romans but that was not the real tragedy. The Temple represented the presence of God, but they had destroyed the real Temple by nailing him to the cross and never repenting of that sin.

As we wonder how Jesus could love people like that, we had better look at ourselves. Is our nation any better as we try to silence God's prophets today? We call good evil and evil good. We celebrate every kind of deviate sexual behavior. We no longer cherish marriage as a lifelong union between one man and one woman. We continually rewrite our history books taking God and his gracious providence out of them. We want to do everything it takes to get God out of America.

And then we know our own personal lives. We know the thoughts of our own hearts, the greed, the lusts, the envy, the jealousy, the bitterness, and other sins that reside there. These are sins that left unchecked can take over a person and lead them forever from Christ. Jesus still loved the people of Jerusalem, and he still loves us. Don't make the same mistake as the people of Jerusalem. Receive Jesus now! He is your only hope! AMEN.