

## A Desolate House

Luke 13:31-35

What do you think of when you hear the word – desolate? I think of a place that is deserted and perhaps barren; a wasteland. I think of words like godforsaken, forlorn, dreary, and uninhabited. I've flown over portions of the American southwest and from the air much of it looks desolate and empty.

Author Mark Twain had this to say about his visit to Lebanon, Syria, and the Holy Land in the year 1867. "..... A desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds... a silent mournful expanse.... a desolation.... we never saw a human being on the whole route.... hardly a tree or shrub anywhere. Even the olive tree and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country." Not a place you'd want to visit, right?

A desolate country is bad enough, but in our Scripture portion today Jesus talks about a desolate house. A normal house is comprised of people, relationships, and families. There's life, warmth, conversation, and love. But a desolate house is empty, silent, cold, and lifeless. There is nothing there to attract one's attention or interest.

What's so sad about the desolate house Jesus talks about is that He didn't intend it to be that way. Instead the house Jesus talked about was to be a light, an example, to all the nations of the world. It was to showcase the tangible results of a people, a nation, whose God dwelt among them and whose laws they willingly obeyed. But the people rejected God's prophets, and eventually His Son, and reaped the inevitable consequences of that rejection – a desolate house.

Our text today is Luke 13:31 to 35. Just prior to this Jesus had issued a solemn warning. He said "strive to enter in at the narrow door; for I say to you, many will seek to enter in and will not be able." He spoke about how many of His listeners, who thought they were in the kingdom, would be shut out. He spoke of the horrible grief they would have as they saw themselves excluded from the kingdom and their place taken by Gentiles! Our text details what happened next. So listen now as I read **Luke 13:31 to35**.

The intense FEELINGS of Jesus recorded in this text show us His heart and help us understand the tragedy of a desolate house.

The First FEELING is one of...

## **Resolute Determination**

Immediately following Jesus teaching about how they were going to be shut out of the kingdom, the Pharisees issued a warning. They said “you’d better get out of here because Herod is determined to kill you!” It’s quite possible these men had been sent by Herod because he was haunted by guilty fears. You can read about Herod’s fears in Mark’s gospel, chapter six.

Herod was cold, calculating, and ruthless. He had John the Baptist beheaded to honor a rash promise made in a moment of gratified sensual desire. And when he heard about Jesus’ miracles he assumed John had been brought back to life. Jesus knew Herod, as the later text proves; and from a human standpoint Herod was a man to be feared.

But we also know the Pharisees were doing some plotting of their own. Back in Luke chapter eleven they were already “lying in wait for Him,” to find a way to accuse and condemn Him. They’d been publicly shamed by Jesus again and again and they were looking for a way to get rid of Him. So it’s obvious their warning to Him was completely insincere.

Herod’s jurisdiction included Galilee and Perea. The Pharisees tried to use fear to cause Jesus to react. But Jesus would have none of it! Jesus had a mission to fulfill and He was not going to be turned aside from it. He was unmoved by Herod’s threats. He had a resolute determination to fulfill His mission.

Jesus is not cowed by the Pharisee’s attempt to make Him fearful; either of them or Herod. He sees right through their scheme. He does acknowledge Herod’s character by calling him a “fox.” Herod was a cruel, cunning enemy of God’s people. The Pharisees had told Jesus to “get out;” now Jesus tells them to “get going” with a message for Herod.

The message Jesus had for Herod and for the Pharisees was, “I’m not going anywhere until my mission is fulfilled.” Notice the text: *“Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I [shall be perfected].”*

When Jesus stated that He would be perfected, He meant that He would complete His course. Perfect humanity is a process and Jesus was passing through that, without sin, but not without temptation and suffering. It is the prophetic present with the sense of the future. This same word is used in Hebrews 2:10. *“For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation*

*perfect through sufferings.*” Christ’s sufferings authenticated, and ultimately fulfilled God’s purpose for His life.

This remarkable language expresses the calm, resolute determination with which Jesus intended to finish His work. His works of mercy were nearing their completion, but were not yet done. He meant to go through with them, one after another, to the last. He was unmoved by Herod’s threat, yet the pace quickens as His works are now hastening to completion.

Jesus further says, in verse 33, *“Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish outside of Jerusalem.”*

One writer paraphrases Jesus statement this way: “He seeks to kill me, does he? Ah! I must be out of Herod’s jurisdiction for that. Go tell him I neither fly from him nor fear him, but Jerusalem is the prophets’ slaughter-house.” Another writes, “It would be contrary to use and [custom], and, in a [sense], to theocratic decorum, if such a prophet as I should perish elsewhere than in Jerusalem.” It was this same accusation by Jesus that so enraged the Pharisees in the ending of Luke chapter eleven.

It seems that Jesus uses satire here. The sense of His words is that it is inadmissible, unthinkable, and preposterous, that a prophet should be put to death **any other place than Jerusalem**. In other words, Jerusalem has a monopoly on the martyrdom of God’ prophets! Yet knowing this, Jesus’ resolute determination leads Him onward to that bloody city. Jesus would do ALL He could to offer forgiveness and redemption to His people.

As followers of Jesus Christ you and I are called to exercise that same resolute determination. We’re called to carry His cross and to finish the work He has marked out for us. In His absence we’ve been given the ministry of reconciliation. Are you and I committed to fulfilling that mission regardless of the opposition?

There are those today who use fear in an attempt to silence the truth. If you speak the truth you’ll be labeled a bigot, a hater, or worse. Recent events demonstrate the use of social stigma and governmental power to stifle the practice and proclamation of Truth. Will we allow ourselves to be intimidated by the “Herods” of our day; or will we, like Jesus, refuse to be turned aside from our mission? Resolute determination is needed!

The Second FEELING is one of...

### **Grievous Lamentation**

At the mention of His impending death in Jerusalem, Jesus utters a grievous lamentation over the city and its people! The repetition, **Jerusalem, Jerusalem**, increases the significance and the pathos of His cry.

The larger context of this lament, in verse 24, pictures Jesus longing for and urging the Jewish people to enter the “narrow door” into His house. Once in the house they would be protected from the coming judgment. He waits as long as He possibly can. But when the Father commands Him to rise up and shut the door, only a minority has accepted His invitation.

The vast majority are left outside the door. When they see the Gentiles entering the kingdom of God in their place there is great weeping and gnashing of teeth. But it’s too late. The choice has been made and all that’s left is the inevitable consequences of their rejection. The prophet Ezekiel informs us that the Lord takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Can you and I say the same? Do we grieve those who enter eternity unprepared?

In great anguish of spirit Jesus cries out *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often I would have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would NOT!”* Notice the contrast here; “How often I would have...you would NOT.” Over and over again God extended mercy and forgiveness to His people and over and over again they rejected His overtures of love.

Jesus takes the homeliest of illustrations and imbues it with divine significance. Picture in your mind those fuzzy little defenseless chicks, completely dependent on their mother. Anytime they feel threatened or frightened they can run to her and hide beneath her protecting wing. If the mother hen is attacked while protecting her chicks she will respond with fury, forgetting her own peril. She will gladly shed her last drop of blood and perish in defense of her young, rather than yield them to the claws of an enemy. What a beautiful picture of what Jesus does and is for you and me and all humanity. This is what He was offering to those in our text.

What was the result of this all this tender and sacrificial love? “You would NOT.” O mysterious word! Mysterious the resistance of such patient Love-mysterious the liberty of self-undoing! The awful dignity of the *will*, the power to choose. And oh, the terrible judgment that is gathering like a storm on the horizon.

Sadly, it’s still this way today. The offer of salvation and protection Jesus offers is still being rejected today. Not only are the rejecters not content with rejecting the message, they will

do all they can to destroy the messengers. Like those in Jesus' audience that day they do not see the gathering storm of God's wrath that's about to break upon them.

Try to imagine the grief and foreboding in the heart of Jesus as He utters the words recorded for us in verse 35. *"Behold, your house is left for you...desolate."* What an awful pronouncement! He knew, He could see, what was coming.

What house is Jesus is talking about? Is it the Temple? Perhaps. If that's the case notice how He calls it *YOUR* house, rather than my house or my Father's house. God's presence was no longer there. It had departed. Their worship was nothing but an empty form. They were, in a sense, milling around the door, claiming Jesus as one of their fellow countrymen, but refusing to acknowledge Him as the only means of entrance. There are many like them today.

But the house Jesus is referring to is more likely the people of Israel; the house spoken of in verse 25. The Temple, the city, and the nation would soon be ravaged by Roman armies. Yet it could have been much different. In Matthew 11:14 Jesus makes it clear that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of the promise of Malachi 4:5. Had the people accepted Jesus as the Messiah, as well as the suffering servant, Jesus would've inaugurated the kingdom. But their rejection postponed that event.

I'm reminded of the words of John Geenleaf Whittier: "For all sad words of tongue and pen, the saddest are these, 'It might have been!'" What an opportunity lost!

Then Jesus closes this text with these words; *"Truly I tell you, you shall not see me, until the time comes when you say 'blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"*

This may be an immediate reference to, what we call, the Triumphal Entry; but I believe it is more than that. You see, when the multitudes shouted their "Hosannas to the Son of David" on that special day, the Pharisees and rulers were indignant! They asked Jesus, "Don't you hear what these people are saying?" They wanted Jesus to hush the multitude, but He refused.

I believe Jesus was looking forward to a time in the distant future, a time prophesied by the prophet Zechariah. *"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst," says the LORD. Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people. And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. And the LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem."*

My friend, where are you in this picture? If you've not yet accepted Jesus' invitation to shelter under His wings His tender heart yearns for you. Put your name in His lament in place of the name Jerusalem! How long will you spurn His love for you? How long will you reject His protective covering? Remember, judgment is gathering like a dark cloud on the horizon. The only way of escape is through the "narrow door," Jesus himself.

And if you already are one of His followers, do you have a resolute determination to see your commitment through to the end? Or will you cower in fear from the threats of men? Will you be faithful in spite of opposition, rejection, and loss?

Is your heart stirred by the realization that every day multitudes of people pass into eternity unprepared? Does that bring a measure of grief to your heart and soul? Or are you like many of the people of Jesus' day, content to go through the motions of religion outside of the power of God?

My friend, whatever your need, today is the day of opportunity; tomorrow may be too late. Accept the love Jesus offers you and make sure your house will not be left desolate.