
Prayers

To God

Weekly theme - dedication to the Lord God

You have done so much for us, Lord God, and You are dedicated to us; Your love for us is unfailingly forgiving and generous. May we respond to Your love with dedication that is also faithful and generous, and may we prove both to You and to other people that the love within us is consistent. We praise You, Lord God, and we live each day of our lives for You and for Your glory! AMEN

For self

Pray about your feeling this day as you face the coming week. There may be many things you should do or ought to do, but find difficult; take them to the Lord in prayer.

For others

Give thanks to God for people you know who are an example to you of true godliness and love. In addition, give thanks to God for people you find difficult or obstructive, perhaps in matters of faith. By doing this, you fulfil Jesus' command to you to love your enemies as well as your neighbours.

Meditation

Lord Jesus, how will you speak to me? What sound will I hear?

An explosion of noise which grabs my attention,
and changes my perspective on everything I see?

A quiet voice that whispers hidden truths in my ear,
to reveal the secrets of Your glorious Kingdom?

A song of tuneful music, with patterns and rhythms,
reflecting the love of Christ growing in my soul?

A never ending roar like the sound of a motorway,
like the great commission to speak out God's Word?

A cacophony of sound that presses on my ear
needing delicate discernment for a whisper of grace?

The silence created after a deafening 'STOP'!
Your divine imperative to rest, and be refreshed?

Lord Jesus, You speak to me throughout my life; let me hear!

Bible Passage

Luke 13:31-35

³¹ At that very moment, some Pharisees came to Jesus and said,

“Get away from here! Herod wants to kill you!”

³² He said to them,

“Go and tell that fox,

‘Listen, I cast out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and I finish my work ‘on the third day’; ³³ but today, tomorrow, and the next day I must keep going, for it cannot be that a prophet should be killed outside of Jerusalem.’

³⁴ *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing!*

³⁵ *Look! Your house is abandoned by you ! Moreover, I tell you that you will not see me again until you say,*

‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

Review

Jesus had just issued a dire warning to His listeners that God’s coming judgement would exclude many who believed they were entitled to enter God’s Kingdom (13:23-30). It was a difficult message that struck at the heart of Jewish religious presumption, but Jesus was not afraid to be unpopular. He had been called to be God’s Servant, One who would never compromise the truth, but pursue His anointed call to the very end. Our passage records Jesus’ response to one particular challenge to His divine call, and His subsequent thoughts about the future of Jerusalem, the city at the heart of Judaism, which had been for so long the ‘dwelling place’ of God (Psalm 74:7, 76:2, 84:1f.).

Some Pharisees came to speak to Jesus with a message from King Herod. We may be surprised by this, because it seems strange for Herod to send messages to Jesus by means of Pharisees. Either the Pharisees were concerned for Jesus and brought Him a message to warn him of Herod’s intent, or they were in league with Herod, but the second interpretation is most likely. Perhaps they were trying to scare Jesus away from the Galilee region towards Jerusalem, where it would be much easier for both the Pharisees and Herod to gain the upper hand over Jesus, and perhaps capture Him! Certainly, the impression of the Pharisees as messengers is reinforced when Jesus sent them back to Herod with a reply (13:32).

This interpretation seems to best fit the Gospel facts. We know already from an earlier part of Luke's Gospel that Herod was deeply unhappy with the idea of prophets operating in his territory (9:7f.), and the price of his murderous despotism had already been paid by John the Baptist. The Pharisees also knew that Jesus knew of John's death, and as they were keen to see the same happen to Jesus (Matthew 12:14f.), their agenda coincided well with that of Herod.

In Jesus' reply to Herod, He calls him 'that fox', which is something of an insight both into Jesus and Herod. It suggests that Jesus was not devoid of political opinion; we often imagine Jesus as politically neutral, but here His colours stand out, He is an opponent of the status quo! The term he uses for Herod, 'fox', could be one of disdain, or it could mean that Herod was a man of deception, perhaps destruction; characteristics often attached to that of a fox, for right or wrong. But while all this is conjecture, we discover quickly enough that Jesus has a distinct message for all who hear Him.

Whatever the distraction, Jesus says he will complete His mission. Pharisees and rulers such as Herod will not stand in the way of God's work, or disrupt Jesus' mission to both His people and the whole world. Referring back to the great occasion when He had announced His mission to those gathered in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:18), Jesus asserts that he will not stop His mission, which is to '*cast out demons and heal people*', and He will do this '*today and tomorrow ... and ... on the third day*' (13:32).

Today, we interpret this as saying that Jesus continued to do His work until completion on the day of His resurrection, the '*third day*' sequentially after His death on Good Friday, which is Easter Sunday. Jesus had already told the disciples that He would be killed and rise again '*on the third day*' (9:22), so this interpretation seems solid enough. I do not disagree, but we should bear in mind that the phrase, which is partially repeated at the beginning of the next verse (13:33), was a first century colloquial 'saying' meaning '*from now until such a time in the future as it is finished*'. From this perspective, Jesus is speaking about the work God intends to complete through Him. The emphasis is not so much on the three days between Jesus' death and resurrection, but on other details of glorious work.

Jesus alludes to the well-known theme of his day, which is that in the sinful days of Israel's kingdoms in the Old Testament, God's people killed His prophets, especially in Jerusalem. There are only two Old Testament passages where such a slaughter is mentioned (1 Kings 18:13, 19:1 and Nehemiah 9:26), though it is understandable, given the history of the prophets, that this was a matter of debate in Jesus's day. So in response to the Pharisees' message that Herod wanted to kill Him, Jesus said He would indeed proceed to Jerusalem because '*it cannot be that a prophet should be killed outside of Jerusalem*' (13:33). Those who heard Jesus would have understood Him as saying that He knew what he was doing; he stood up to Herod's threat because as God's prophet, it was His destiny to go to Jerusalem to die.

Verse 34 picks up this same theme as Jesus bewails what this means; the rejection of God by His people. It is a memorable saying and is found word for word in Matthew 23:37. These verses contain the remarkable and powerful picture of God's love for His people likened to that of a hen. Of course, Jesus is speaking specifically of God's love for Israel, but it is a love that has been tragically rejected. Jesus' mission is ultimately one of anguish because the people of Israel had failed in their call, and Jesus now had to complete God's will as His suffering Servant (Isaiah 53). To this day, although God's love is still constant, He grieves over the rejection of those He loves; it is a sentiment we can surely understand.

In the last verse of this passage, Jesus prophesies the consequences of Israel's rejection. When He says '*Your house is abandoned by you ...*', He is speaking dramatically of the end of God's presence in an earthly building. This is something that tore at Jesus's heart, and also caused him to famously turn over the tables of the money-changers in the Temple (Luke

19:45f.). The Temple was indeed abandoned by the Jewish people and sacked by the Romans in A.D. 70, and has never been rebuilt (the dome visible on the site of the Temple Mount today is a seventh century AD mosque). So Jesus' prophetic words came true.

Jesus words have far reaching consequences, and despite the abandonment of His people Israel, He speaks of a time when God will be reunited with His people. When they recognise Him as their Messiah with the words from Psalm 118, '*Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*', there is a possibility that they will be reunited with their God (13:35). This is a positive way of putting what is said by Jesus rather negatively, but His words reveal the heartache of God. The nature of God's love is such that despite the dire consequences of rejection, he perceives a time of restoration.

There is a great deal in this passage. Here, we see Jesus' heart set on the journey He has to make it to Jerusalem to complete God's will. It is not a simple passage of teaching, like so many other parables given to the disciples, it is rather the outpouring of Jesus heart, knowing what lies ahead.

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V32 'cast out demons and heal people'

Other translations:

'I cast our devils and I do cures' (King James)

'casting out demons and performing cures' (NRSV)

The Greek sentence translates literally as 'cast out demons and do healings'; but I prefer 'heal people' because it means the same thing and is more like the normal English people speak today.

V35 'Look! Your house is abandoned by you!'

Other translations:

'Look, your house is left to you desolate!' (NIV)

'See, your house is left to you' (NRSV)

The considerable differences between the various translation here is due to the use of the Greek word 'aphiemi', which means a number of different things according to the context of the sentence, possibly '*to let go, to permit, or to forgive*'. I have taken the meaning '*let go*' as in '*abandoned*'. In addition, the 'dative' in Greek can either be '*to you*' or '*by you*', and in this sentence, it makes far more sense to say '*by you*'.

Further Comments

The Pharisees' intent

Although I am of the general opinion that the Pharisees in this story were in collusion with Herod, I still think it is worth considering whether the message brought to Jesus was perhaps

friendly, rather than devious. There are a number of indications in the Gospels that not every Pharisee was against Jesus; Nicodemus was an example (John 3), and Jesus did not completely dismiss the Pharisee Simon, when he was invited to dinner (Luke 7:39f.).

Even if it was the case that these Pharisees were friendly, they seem to have missed the mark. They appear to have warned Jesus not to go to Jerusalem, for fear that if He went there, King Herod would be able to arrest Him and do to Him what he had done to John the Baptist. If we think of our passage in this way, then Jesus's words still stand as His insistence on pursuing the Father's agenda and completing His will.

Killing and stoning prophets

Jesus' talk of the killing and stoning of prophets was picked up quickly by the early Christians, who saw this as evidence of the rejection of God by Judaism. Indeed, Jesus taught this in His famous parable of the vineyard (Matt 21:28f.). Perhaps the most interesting example of this idea to be picked up in the New Testament is found in the story of Stephen in Acts chapter 7. Here, Stephen brings his great sermon to a conclusion with the accusation against the Jews that resulted in his stoning:

⁵¹ "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors used to do. ⁵² Which of the prophets did your ancestors not persecute? They killed those who foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and now you have become his betrayers and murderers.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the Old Testament.

There are two instances of a connection with the Old Testament in this passage, and both found in verse 35. When we speak of the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, we should remember that the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed on many occasions, and the Bible speaks of them all. To begin with, the Temple built by Solomon was destroyed by the Babylonians in the sixth century BC, and was rebuilt in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. This is the destruction of the Temple prophesied by Jeremiah when he says,

'But if you will these words, I swear by myself, says the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation.' (Jeremiah 22:5)

Looking at this from a historical perspective allows us to see that Jesus was not pulling His prophecy out of thin air, because of the sins of Israel there was a history of the destruction of the Temple, and Jesus' prophecy was built on a solid knowledge of what had happened in Israel in the past.

Remember as well that Solomon's Temple, rebuilt in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, was not as grand as the old building. It was eventually replaced in the years just before the coming of Christ by Herod the Great. It was still relatively new when it was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD.

The remarkable psalm 118

The very last sentence of this passage is a quote from Psalm 118, as we saw in the review. Psalm 118 is worth reading because within it, you will find a number of words and themes that crop up in Jesus' teaching. For example, this famous proclamation stands very close to Jesus' predictions of His death and resurrection;

'I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord. (118:17)

Then, later on in the psalm, we find these words, which are quoted by Jesus several times (Matthew 21:42, Luke 20:17), and becomes a theme of Paul's writing (Ephesians 2:20), and one of Peter's letters (1 Peter 2:6)

'the stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone' (118:22)

Lastly, Psalm 118 verse 26 contains the words that are quoted by Jesus here in this text, and they are words that are spoken when Jesus enters Jerusalem (Matt 21:9 Luke 19:38).

²⁶ Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord. (118:26)

According to some rabbis, Psalm 118 was composed for David's coronation and was therefore to be recited when the Messiah came, for His anointing! Yet again, this scriptural connection shows Jesus' use of popular beliefs about the Messiah, challenging what people thought and asking them to apply what they knew about the Messiah to Himself.

Discipleship

Application

The picture of the hen

The famous picture of God as a hen gathering chicks is enigmatic because it is a very feminine picture, but one that cannot be ignored because of that. It does not tell us that God is feminine, as some more radical Christians believe, it tells us that these feminine characteristics are part of the way God expresses His love for us. that is quite different.

In common with so many Scriptural pictures of God, it suggests that God is always seeking to unite His people, who, left to their own devices, run around in different directions! If this was true of God's people of Old Testament times, it is certainly true of God's people today! But, praise God, there is an answer to our disorder and divisions, and this is the Love of God that ultimately will not let us go and will draw us always back to Himself.

The Bible tells us that God will do just this for His people Israel, and He will surely do the same and more for His wayward people today! I long for the day when all God's people will worship Him around His throne in glory, and I know that this day will come!

The role of a prophet

It seems that the role of a prophet is to do what is unpalatable and difficult, and to persist whatever the cost. With this Biblical picture in mind, one that is found throughout the Bible, we need to be careful not to promote the idea that prophecy is something rather like people standing up in church and saying nice things.

To be sure, there are many messages of love that God has for His people, and the message of the Gospel is the supreme, and ultimately the only pure message of love. However, as Paul recognises in his famous letter to the Corinthians, prophecy is given for this world, so that God can communicate His will in both love and judgement to His people today. Sometime this message must be hard to hear, especially when the church has colluded in sin, for example, or when new things must be faced if the Gospel is to be preached.

A true prophet is always more interested in the purity of God's message than its reception, just as Jesus was more interested in the end of His mission than accounting for the feelings or thoughts of the cruel King Herod.

Ideas for what to do

- Ask yourself whether the ministry of Jesus is properly reflected in the life of the church today. What does this passage of Scripture tell us about Jesus's priorities for ministry,

and why? Why do you think that Jesus omits subjects like preaching and teaching from what He says in this passage?

- Use a Bible dictionary or the Internet (Wikipedia) to look up the city of Jerusalem, and acquaint yourself with its history from the earliest times under King David, to its reconstruction and King Herod. Explore the later history of the Muslim occupation of the seventh century AD and what has happened to it in more recent times since the restoration of the state of Israel.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Why do you think Jesus replies with this outburst to a simple message brought to him from Herod? Why do you think the Pharisees said this in verse 31?
2. How important is Jerusalem, as a city, to God's people today? It was clearly very important in Old Testament times, but does that mean it is important today?
3. Will God accept His Old Testament people back into a covenant relationship at the end of time with or without their repentance?

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, speak to me and let me hear Your voice. May I never turn away from listening to what You would tell me, and may I always be ready to listen and act on Your Word. Reveal to me what You will of the future, Lord Jesus, and use me for the completion of Your will, I pray.

AMEN
