

“And You Would Not” (Luke 13:34)

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. We see the genuine humanity of our Great God and King Jesus in these words from Luke 13:34: **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!”** It is important to note dear Christians that this text is very appropriate for the Lenten season that leads us to consider Christ’s passion and suffering for us. It comes out here in a powerful manner: Jesus is mourning.

The repetition of the word “Jerusalem” is an expression of deep mourning. It is like King David mourning over his son Absalom. When the death of Absalom was announced to David, the Word of God records, **“The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, ‘O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!’”** (2nd Samuel 19:4) But what you have to understand – if you remember the account – Absalom was trying to kill his father David; he wanted to take the kingdom away from his own father. Absalom was bent against his own father and wanted to destroy him. David about all of this, but when he learned of his son’s death, David cried, **“O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!”** David’s commander of the army, Joab, confronted David as he mourned and said, **“you love those who hate you.”** (2nd Samuel 19:6) Joab did not understand David, but David was a man after God’s own heart. (1st Samuel 13:14)

In the same way, God incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ mourned for Jerusalem: **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it!”** It is important to understand that Jesus was not merely recounting the history that had occurred up to this point, the fact that the prophets who had been sent to her were indeed persecuted and in some cases murdered. The Lord, however, was also anticipating the fact that Jerusalem was about to do the same thing to Him! He knew that His own people; his own sons and his own daughters that He loved with the greatest love, were not only going to reject Him, but they were going to crucify Him. But even while knowing all of this, Jesus mourned on account of His love for them – He was heart-broken – and out of His broken heart for them He expressed His love for them even though they hated him. **Jesus loves those who hate Him.** But He mourns, because for anyone to hate Him means that they do not merely reject **Him**, but they reject **the salvation** He brings. We must know that Jesus *is* our salvation; there is no salvation apart from Him. To reject Him therefore, is to reject salvation. For this Jesus mourns: **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...”**

It is important now to pay attention to our translation: the ESV at verse 34 says, **“How often would I have...”** It’s a little challenging to get the feel of the actual word here in the original language. It is perhaps better translated, **“How often have I willed...”** The actual word being used is the word “thelo,” which means “desire, want to, wish to, long for, etc.” Jesus is saying “How often I desired, wanted to, wished to, longed for...” what? He long desired to -- as the text says – **“gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood [her chicks] under her wings...”**

Don't underestimate the word "gather." It's an Old Testament concept that stands for the restoration of God's people. Once they were lost, scattered and subject to exile and suffering; but when the Lord "gathers" He brings His people back, He restores them, He renews them; He saves them. Jesus longs to gather you and me; He longs to have us in the safe place of His tender, loving mercy, He longs to have us rescued from sin, death and the power of the devil; this is His earnest desire; His very, very great desire for you and for me. Thus, the Word of God proclaims:

Ezekiel 18:23: ***"Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?"***

1st Timothy 2:4: ***"[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."***

2nd Peter 3:9: ***"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."***

And to show this true desire that our Savior has for us, He compares Himself to a certain animal. During the season of a Lent a few years ago, my family and I were listening to our Lenten New Testament for 40 days; listening to the Word as a family. After each session, I quizzed my children; asking them various questions from what we had been learning from listening to each chapter of the New Testament. I asked the children a question in regard to Matthew 23 (which is the parallel to Luke 13). My question was something to the effect of, "Jesus says He is like what kind of animal

that wants to gather its babies?" One of my children answered first with, "a camel." The second answer coming from another child was "a lamb." I had to laugh, because this particular passage is quite unique. The answer of course – in this particular case – is that our Lord compares Himself to a ***mother hen***.

Jesus is a hen that longs/desire for His chicks to be gathered up so as to protect them and guard them with all His might. He is a mother hen that does not want to risk anything harmful coming upon His chicks, so He hurries to them and covers them under His wings. God came down to earth in Christ to gather you into His perfect care and protection; and for anything to harm you, quite frankly, cause Him to grieve (even your own sin, Ephesians 4:30: ***"And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."***).

Upon closer inspection of the Holy Scriptures, however, we see that the idea of being under God's wings is more common than you might think:

Psalm 36:7: ***"How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings."***

Psalm 57:1: ***"Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by."***

Psalm 91:4: ***"He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler."***

Is there any message as comforting as this? That you could be going through the worst storms in life, but that the Lord – our Great God – eagerly comes to you, joyfully finds you, and then proceeds to cover you in His Divine and most-loving protection to keep you in His care until the storms are past! Thanks be to God and praise the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ!

But...the text goes on to record why Jesus is mourning. In spite of this great love from God in Christ, Jesus sees that while He would, the people of Jerusalem would not; while Jesus desired them; while Christ our Lord wished to gather them and cover them with His divine wings, they were not willing that Jesus would do any of these things for them. This is beyond amazing; it is beyond all understanding. Imagine someone coming to you and freely giving you a billion dollars and you say, “No thank you.” Imagine someone coming to you and saying, “Take this new medicine, and your loved one will be free of terminal cancer.” And you say, “No thank you.” Take these scenarios and make them infinitely better: God comes and says, “Here is my gift to you in Jesus Christ and with it, you will never die; and you will be given my Kingdom for eternity! And even now for your time here on earth; in my Son and in the forgiveness of sins He gives, you will walk with God with a clear conscience and be led by the Holy Spirit to give glory to God all the days of your life and know the peace of God that surpasses all understanding that will guard your heart and your mind for the rest of your days here on earth!” And a person says to that, “No thank you.” ***This is what causes our Lord to mourn!***

Like wayward chicks (as *The Lutheran Study Bible* states), p. 1745), the people stubbornly resist God’s will for their lives. We

should not stand back and say, “Those stupid people!” Rather, this text in Luke 13 should humble us in a way that I cannot even begin to describe, because the hearts of those hard-hearted people of Jerusalem were hearts not unlike our own. This text should alarm us; indeed, it should cause to tremble in holy fear. The fact is that we are no better than those people of Jerusalem. We too have sinful hearts. The Word of God in Jeremiah 17:9 is true for you as well: ***“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”*** Our Formula of Concord states, *“The human will rejects and perverts the means and instrument of the Holy Spirit, which God offers it through the call.”* (FC SD XI 41) This truth does not only apply to the people who rejected Christ in Jerusalem, but it applies to us as well. A great Lutheran exegete and scholar (now sainted) R.C.H. Lenski wrote, *“Grace is not irresistible...Damnation results from man’s own will, which settles into permanent, obdurate, unaccountable resistance against God’s will of grace. The more God draws the will with the power of grace, the more this will rejects God, until grace with its power can do no more.”* (Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Luke’s Gospel*, p. 762)

These words should terrify us and should make us realize just how great a threat our sinful flesh really is. We are daily candidates for our flesh to lead us to possess hard hearts, that we would no longer desire the Word of God; that we would no longer feel our need for the grace of God and the forgiveness of sins; that our hearts would come to the point of no longer desiring Jesus Christ, our Only Savior. This Gospel from Luke 13 is given to you dear Christian so that you would be alarmed by this constant possibility and so that you would cry out to God to save you from

your will that causes you to run in the opposite direction when you see Christ coming to save.

But know this dear Christian: Jesus does not run from you! Jesus did not speak these words to condemn you, but to lead you to repentance so that you would be saved! He calls you and is not willing to lose you to sin. How can we be so sure? It is for one reason: Jesus did indeed come back to Jerusalem which had forsaken Him. He came back into Jerusalem so that even though they hated Him, He came back so as to give them the greatest love; and to give you the greatest love. Like David loved his son who hated him, even more Christ loves you who by nature – apart from grace – are an enemy of God. He came back to fulfill what He came to do; to suffer and die for our sin that leads us to resist Him; with our sin that causes us to deny Him; with our sin that makes us unwilling when He is willing.

He came back to Jerusalem to pay for and cover that sin, so that that which causes us to resist would be covered by His blood. In this blood of Christ, something else is given: we now find God's favor not only to believe in Christ and to desire that He come to cover us with His wings, but we are given a new life in our baptismal grace; we are born again! That means dear Christian, that you also have a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26). It is a heart that by God's grace leads you to run to Christ who runs to you; to desire Christ who desires you; to seek Christ who seeks you; to rejoice in Christ who rejoices over you.

All of this is true, because Christ was successful in covering you already. He covered your sin with His blood on Calvary's cross,

but He also covered you when you were baptized into Him. You are covered now and in the Holy Sacrament today, you will be covered again. It is an accomplished reality and it will continue to be accomplished! That means you have already crossed over from death to life (John 5:24); and this means that even when our own hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts (1st John 3:20): He leads us to Christ who did not come to condemn us, but to save us! (John 3:17)

Rejoice Christians, Christ covers you with His perfect care: your sins are covered; your old heart is covered by a new one; your old will is covered by a new will so that you see Christ coming: He desires to cover you again like a mother hen to protect you, to guard you, to save you and by grace through faith in Jesus, you run to Him as He runs to you and you are (and ever shall be) resting in the shadow of His wings!