

## Luke Through Lent - Hard Journey

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Luke 13:22-35

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Have you ever been burnt by a wolf in sheep's clothing? Have you met someone who is meant to be a shepherd of God's people, caring for them and tending to them, but they turned out to be more like a butcher than a shepherd?

Have you ever looked up to someone in leadership in the church but been betrayed or deceived? It could be an elder, a Bible study leader, a pastor, minister or preacher and then you find that they've been abusing their wife and children, or they've been leading a double life, deceiving everyone, having multiple affairs, or committing fraud?

I know, crushingly, I have met these people. I have felt betrayed and deceived by them.

Today, we hear Jesus say about people who ate and drank with him, who seemed to know him. "I don't know you." So, how do we be discerning and wise in who to trust, and how do we examine ourselves to ensure that **we** aren't heading the wrong way?

We start with the Bible. We are a Bible-Based, Christ-Centred Church. So, if you have a Bible with you, or you want to pick one up from the table by the door, then you can check up on what I'm teaching, see if what the preacher says lines up with the truth of the Bible.

We are all on a sinking ship. You and I need a life-saver. Everyone needs a Saviour.

V23 One person asked Jesus - "are only a few people going to be saved?" Jesus doesn't answer directly, but instead, he encourages everyone to make every effort, to **Strive** to be included. This doesn't mean we achieve salvation ourselves but we put in every effort to genuinely seek Jesus and His will for us. The emphasis is on striving now, as opposed to seeking to enter later on. We are assured that those who strive now do enter whilst those who wait for later may leave it until it is too late.

Some people claim that they should be let in because of physically being close to Jesus. "we ate and drank with you and you taught in our streets" I imagine this to be like the people who claim "Anglican" on the census. They know where the door is, and how to access it. They just decide it's not that important, they can do it later. When it's too late, they go to the door knowing exactly where to go, and they are assuming they'll get in, so they presume on the owner to let them in.

"Knock, knock, knock, let me in!" ... "who's there?" "I'm Anglican" ... "I don't know you or where you come from"

"I'm Catholic, Methodist, Uniting, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Baptist ..." Religion does not save people. Denominations do not save people ... only Jesus saves. He is the only life-saver on this sinking ship.

In the passage Jesus places people who ate and drank with him outside. In that time, to eat and drink with someone was a big deal. It signalled a closeness. Like when Jesus was accused of eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. To people of that time, that meant that Jesus welcomed tax collectors and sinners, he was a friend of sinners. In today's passage, the people eating and drinking with Jesus may be those wolves in sheep's clothing I referred to earlier. It could even be some people with us here today. On Sundays they seem to be faithful followers of Jesus, but they don't give their Mondays to Saturdays to God. They have dark secrets in their lives like domestic violence, clergy who abuse others. It is people who

harden their hearts to God and his ways starting with little choices that grow into bigger and bigger lies and deceptions.

It is people who seem to know God. They come to church, are involved, eating and drinking with Jesus. But they have an area of sin they are deliberately holding back from surrendering to Jesus. They are living a double life that no one else knows about, no one other than Jesus who knows exactly what is going on. I'm not talking about the sin that all of us still get caught in. We will not be sinless this side of eternity. But there are some who get so lost in a sin that they harden their hearts and continue in it with no repentance. They, and all who knew them will be sadly surprised on the day of judgment that they are left out. This is challenging and hard hitting stuff.

If you fear that may be you hardening your heart toward God, then please come and talk to me. We can pray together, seek God, and work it through.

But it is serious. We can't take weeping and gnashing of teeth lightly. However you interpret hell or eternal separation from God. Whether you think of hell like a literal lake of burning fire, or you think of it as being separated from God, the source of everything good. Jesus is clear that it will be devastating for those who left it too late, or who have eaten and drunk with Jesus but didn't fully let him into their lives. When they can't get in, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

There are elements of the church who prefer to only emphasise God's love - and neglect passages like this that mention judgement. By skipping over them or arguing around them we do a huge injustice to ourselves and our wider society. We are on a sinking ship and there is only one life-saver. People need to know him.

As those who are listening to Jesus, the emphasis is on striving to be included now. So first we need to heed Jesus' advice ourselves. There is a way to make sure that we are not, and never become those surprised ones to whom Jesus says, "I never knew you."

It involves talking to him - praying.

It involves Confessing our sin and letting Him forgive us. That doesn't just mean saying the words of a prayer of confession on a Sunday. It means genuinely inviting Jesus into the darkest parts of our hearts and souls. It means not holding anything back.

It involves listening to him - reading His Word and listening in prayer.

This passage also encourages us to convey this seriousness and urgency to others. I know my natural way of approaching people is to 'love them'. To be kind and gentle and hope that they may see something in my life that will make them want to seek God. I pray that my lifestyle and love will convince people that God loves them. But if people are on a sinking ship, is it loving to act as if they're not?

There comes a time when we need to speak up. To strongly suggest that people need to seek Jesus.

Isaiah 55.6-7 Seek the Lord while he may be found;

call on him while he is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake their ways

and the unrighteous their thoughts.

Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them,

and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

We don't just warn people away from judgement and the bad consequences of not knowing Jesus. We also hold out the forgiveness, love and joy of God. There is both the carrot and the stick, the banquet of joy and the gnashing of teeth.

Sometimes we hear this call to evangelism as a scary thing. But let me encourage you that it is a call for the whole church to proclaim Jesus. It is a call for every part of the body of Christ to exercise their gifts and skills to introduce others to Jesus. This may be as simple as inviting friends who aren't yet Christians to share a meal with some Christian friends. It may be inviting people to a special Christmas, or Easter service, or to your connect group where everyone is very friendly and welcoming. It may be inviting people to an Alpha course or, it may be you joining in with a club or activity that others are doing. Along the way you can pray for people and intentionally share nuggets of gospel truth when the opportunity arises.

Jesus finishes this part of his teaching with a kick in the tail. His audience were mostly Jewish, and they probably felt quite content that they were God's chosen people and would be the inheritors of the kingdom - He tells them that people will come from the east, west, north and south. That those people would be included in the glorious feast in the kingdom of God whilst those listening would be thrown out. It doesn't sound fair. It sounds like Jesus is suggesting that even those non-Jewish unclean Gentiles will be included. Yes, that's what he means. He means that those who strive to be included will be whilst those who just assume they're "in" may be left out.

Verse 30 says "there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last". We aren't the judges of who will be included. In the next part of Isaiah 55.8-9 God says,  
"For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways,"  
declares the Lord.

9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

God's ways are higher than ours. It's not our place to judge who is in and who is out. We need to encourage each other, and everyone to seek God while he may be found. Again, there is no indication that those who are seeking him will be excluded. So if we're seeking him with an open heart, we have nothing to fear. But the warning is plain for the world to hear. We are on a sinking ship. We all need a life-saver. And that lifesaver is Jesus. And what better person to be our lifesaver than Jesus whose heart is so tender and who is so full of mercy.

When the Pharisees warn Jesus that Herod wants to kill him Jesus shows strength, tenderness and compassion. I wondered, "¿Were the Pharisees that warned Jesus really interested in his well-being?" Well, I think it's possible ... but it's most likely they were looking for a way to get rid of Jesus without having to wear any guilt. Jesus' response to their advice shows his strength. He shows determination to do God's will in spite of opposition, he is focused on going to Jerusalem where he will do his work on the cross and on the third day rise. It is through His cross and resurrection that he opens the door for those who genuinely seek him.

The question is, will the people of Jerusalem grasp hold of the benefits Jesus will win for them, or will they reject God's protection?

Despite the history of God's people in Jerusalem, Jesus still reveals his loving heart towards them. And let's really see the emotion in what He's saying here.

Jesus' heart wrenching cry over Jerusalem must be heard. "Jerusalem ... Jerusalem ... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing" (v34). He is lamenting the fact that God's chosen people have rejected so many of the prophets before him, and Jesus knows that many will reject him, God's Son as well.

Jesus longs to protect God's people from the fires of judgement to come. He wants the sacrifice he will make to count for them. The image of the mother hen gathering her chicks under her wings may seem to

be a loving gesture designed to keep the chicks warm, or protect them from a cold wind. But it is so much more than that.

In a number of passages of Scripture God metaphorically has wings. The Psalmist pleads in Psalm 17, "Hide me in the shadow of your wings" (v8). God's metaphorical wings are a place in which to be sheltered. In Psalm 57 we read, "Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed" (v1). Under God's wings is the place to be when disaster strikes, there, close to God we find protection.

In the book of Ruth, when Boaz tells Ruth that he knows the good things she has done, he continues, saying, "May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge" (Ruth 2.12).

There are other passages that speak of finding refuge close to God, and under his wings. I looked up "hen protects chicks" on Youtube this week and found a bunch of fierce, protective mother hens. I don't have time to show them to you, but there were a bunch of mother hens with incredibly cute chicks hiding beneath them, under their wings. Then there were a bunch of fierce hens defending their chicks from some goats, a vicious attacking crow and some king cobras. These hens were impressive, and I think a bit scary as they came against predators 10 times their size. It's amazing to think, our God wants us to think of him when we watch mother hens protecting their young.

The people of Jerusalem had their chance to respond to Jesus' call. After they welcomed him as royalty with palm branches and singing, "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" he turned out to not be the type of king they wanted and they all rejected him. But following His death and resurrection where he bore that fire of judgement so that we could shelter under his wings, God's people in Jerusalem had the opportunity to trust Jesus once again. The church was born as more and more people came to accept that Jesus had paid the price so that they could be given life.

Today we have the same call. Jesus calls out to us as a mother hen clucks to her chicks ... come to me, you will find life. Come to me, you will find refuge in the storm. Come to me, you will find shelter in the fire. Come to Jesus, he's all you need.

Jesus is strong. Like a mother hen standing fiercely in the face of terrifying opposition, to protect her young and give them life. Jesus stands in our place, bearing our sin to protect us and give us life. And Jesus is tenderhearted. He laments over people who have rejected God and His way of salvation. He mourns even as people choose death rather than life with him.

As Christians we can expect to experience some of the pain of seeing people reject their loving God, but we have the assurance and strength of God by our side, protecting, holding and sheltering us in the storm. And we have the opportunity to continue holding out God's offer of salvation, showing how much God loves us by the way we love others and by the way we offer others to share the same shelter that we rejoice in. We also need to ensure we aren't hardening our hearts towards God. So we confess our sin, and let God deal with the darkest parts of our hearts. We are on a sinking ship and Jesus is the lifesaver the whole world needs. He is the Mother Hen who calls her young to safety, protection and life.