



Sermon Preparatory Notes

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Sermon Notes:

Luke 13:(22-30)31-35

The Gospel lection for this Sunday represents a challenge for preachers on several levels.

Many Biblical scholars break the pericope into two units. They argue that verses 31-33 offer an apothegm (a saying) that ends with the word Jerusalem while verses 34-35 voice a lament that *begins* with a two-fold repetition of the word Jerusalem. Some exegetes puzzle over the near repetition of the triad “today, tomorrow, and the next/third day” in verses 32 and 33. Could it be that scholars have two textual units here, barely hanging together by a repeated keyword and a duplicated triad that sounds like a passion prediction? Many exegetes are also baffled by the role of the Pharisees who issue the warning

to Jesus about Herod in verse 31 -- are the Pharisees acting as friends, foes, or somewhere in between?

So many scholarly questions; so few verses! What is a Gospel preacher to do?

We begin by trying to read Luke 13:31-35 hermeneutically within its narrative context: from parts to whole, as it were. We note first of all that these five verses are situated in a Lukan journey from Galilee that begins at Luke 9:51, when Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem.” The apothegm, the repeated triads about days, the lament, the multiple references to Jerusalem begin to make more sense if we don’t treat them antiseptically. Instead, we can allow them to do their puzzling work in the midst of the several-chapters’ long journey that is Jesus’ trip to Jerusalem. Whatever these five puzzling verses are about, they are set within an intentional Lukan narrative set in Galilee, but looking toward Jerusalem, and all that the city means to Luke.

This hermeneutical frame begins to help make sense of the beginning of Luke 13:31-35. Pharisees approach Jesus, warn him about Herod, and urge him to move on. The text does not speculate on the motives of the Pharisees (at other points, Luke seems willing to disclose their motives), so we do not need to assume deception on their part. In verse 32, Jesus turns to compare the necessity of attending to Herod’s threat to kill as opposed to what God deems necessary for Jesus to do. The fact that Jesus views it more urgent to go to Jerusalem

because of God's will than to heed warnings about Herod, seems to indicate that the ultimate concern is *theological*.

This theological perspective is indicated first in the little passion prediction of verse 32 by the presence of a divine passive at the end of the first triad: today, tomorrow, and "finished" on the third day. The things being finished are Jesus' day-by-day works of God's kingdom: healings and exorcisms. Herod is just a clever little fox; God is in charge.

That said, verse 33 picks up the triad of days and takes them to the ultimate destination: Jerusalem. Here Luke indicates the divine will through his use of the Greek word "it is necessary" (*dei*), a term typical of the evangelist's theological narrative. The contrast here is not simply repeated triads about days, or even relative threats from local rulers like Herod, but an inexorable *divine* will. For it is God's concern that impels Jesus to the journey's end in Jerusalem, where he fulfills a prophet's destiny.

This theological coupling of divine will and the prophet's role helps to smooth over the rough boundary between the apothegm of 13:31-33 and the lament of 13:34-35. Both are concerned with Jerusalem because they in turn confront the city and grieve its pain. In the lament of verses 34-35, Jesus' words compare his desire to shelter with a mother hen's poignant attempt to protect her brood with extended wings -- no matter the threat.

Please note, the prophetic voice of Jesus' lament is in the second person: Jerusalem and its unwilling children are addressed as "you." Here, the lament extends the

prophetic word of the inexorable divine will in 13:31-33 into the equally prophetic divine pathos that lies in the heart of the prophet who speaks for God. The lament is rounded out with a faint hope reminiscent of Psalm 118:26.

Jerusalem's people will not recognize him until they one day acclaim him themselves, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."

Luke joins together in 13:31-35 what seems to us units of tradition that do not really follow. Set in the extended story that begins with 9:51 and ends in Jerusalem, however, and with attention to Luke's theological way of narrating, the puzzling fragments begin to make a bit more sense. Jesus' future is not Herod's to decide. God is setting the travel agenda. Thus, for prophets like Jesus, Jerusalem is the place to move toward: both the focus of his prophetic task and the object of his prophetic pathos in lament.

Preachers would be well advised to mind what the pericope both says and does not say. The text joins together Jesus' prophetic resolve with his equally prophetic pathos of the mother hen. The image Jesus invokes is both fierce and vulnerable. The hen iconically holds together the tensions of the prophetic tradition as a whole even while it underlines the scandal of Luke's vulnerable *crucified* Lord.

What Luke 13:31-35 does *not* say, however, is just as important. The rejection of the prophets is part and parcel of the Jewish tradition. It is not a license of contemporary interpreters to turn Jerusalem into Jesus' enemy, or to treat Judaism in any sense that contradicts Jesus' own

maternal concern and embodied engagement for Jerusalem's children. Gospel preachers need to know and name the difference.

Commentary 2

Luke 13:31-35 begins with a warning from the Pharisees for Jesus about Herod's plan to kill him, but it becomes a reflection on the nature of Jesus' life and mission (which reach their ultimate goal in his death) and then on the tragic role played by Jerusalem in the life of Jesus and other prophets.

The passage invites Christians today to reflect on the meaning of Jesus' life and death and on the role we play in the continuing mission of Jesus.

The Pharisees and Herod

It is difficult to evaluate the motives of the Pharisees in the story. It is also difficult to evaluate whether or not their warning is either sincere or representative of a real threat. As in all the Gospels, the Pharisees in Luke are largely antagonistic to Jesus and Jesus to them. There are hints, however, of a more positive reception by the Pharisees. In 7:36 and 14:1, for instance, Pharisees invite Jesus into their homes (although the scenes do not play out well for them), and in Acts 15:5 we hear that some Pharisees had actually become Christians. We thus cannot dismiss the Pharisees' motives as necessarily being negative.

On the other hand, their report seems problematic: Luke 9:7-9 and 23:8 suggest Herod's interest in Jesus was not in killing him, and when given the chance to condemn

Jesus in the Passion account, Herod refuses to do so (23:6-12). We cannot be sure of Herod's status in the passage, however, because of course Herod had both imprisoned and executed John the Baptist (3:19-20; 9:9).

Jesus' Death a Part of His Mission

Whatever the purposes of the Pharisees and Herod, Jesus uses the threat to make clear the nature of his upcoming death as a part of his mission. Jesus is going to die, but it will have nothing to do with the threat of Herod. Rather, his death is the completion of his present ministry. He characterizes this ministry as "casting out demons and performing cures" (verse 32). Both activities are by themselves important:

- The significance of casting out demons for Jesus' ministry is given in 11:20: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you." Casting out demons is part of Jesus' battle against the devil (see further 11:21-22) and thus a part of his establishment of the kingdom of God.
- Performing cures is likewise a part of the fundamental character of Jesus' mission, announced in 4:18-19 as being "to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind" (quoting Isaiah), also a statement about the establishment of God's kingdom. To reinforce that Herod has no control over him, Jesus adds that he will be doing these things "today *and tomorrow*" (verse 32, emphasis added).

When Jesus follows this statement about “today and tomorrow” by saying that “on the third day I finish my work,” it is perhaps not apparent from these words alone what he means. Indeed, the reference to “the third day” probably sounds to most readers like a reference to the resurrection. Perhaps the resurrection is meant to be included, but the following verse makes it clear that it is his death that Jesus primarily has in mind: “Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem” (verse 33).

The important point to note is that Jesus’ death is in continuity with the rest of his ministry -- “today,” “tomorrow,” and “the third day” go together. Jesus’ death is not of a fundamentally different character than his ministry while he was alive: They are all about establishing the kingdom of God. Holding together Jesus’ life and death helps us to make better sense of both.

Jerusalem: A Tragic Role

Jesus has been journeying to Jerusalem since 9:51, a journey that lasts all the way through 19:28 in Luke’s Gospel (often referred to as Luke’s “Journey Narrative”). Jesus’ mention of his death there leads him to reflect on the tragedy that Jerusalem had been in Israel’s past and will be in Jesus’ future, even though its role is a necessary one, as the end of verse 33 makes clear.

Jesus' prophetic reflection alternates between denunciation and compassion:

- He first indicts Jerusalem as "the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it" (verse 34). The irony is heavy. Jerusalem, after all, is "the place that the Lord your God will choose out of all your tribes as his habitation to put his name there" (Deuteronomy 12:5). That the city of God's habitation becomes the seat of such violent opposition to God is part of the ironic tragedy of Israel's own story, including Jesus' story.
- Immediately following this indictment we have the compassionate and agonized plea of v. 35b: Jesus (speaking for God?) longs to shelter the children of Israel like a mother hen does for her brood.
- Nevertheless, punishment is announced in verse 35: "your house is left to you desolate" (NIV; the NRSV's overly literal translation misses the point), probably a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (the "house" of God) in A.D. 70.
- But Jesus ends with a recognition that Jerusalem will, at least for a moment, recognize him (verse 35b). He refers, of course, to his triumphal entry on Palm Sunday.

Jesus' Mission and Death, and Our Own Sometimes-Tragic Role

Throughout Lent we are preparing ourselves to experience Jesus' cross. This passage calls us to do so by considering whether our lives lead

appropriately to that cross. Can we make sense of our lives as a part of the establishment of God's kingdom in our world? Or are we frightened from our mission by the threats of earthly rulers? Moreover, if Jesus were to speak prophetically to us, what would his message be? How have we resisted God's messages and kingdom? Paul refers to the church as a temple, as the dwelling of God's Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16-17). So how have we played the tragic role of Jerusalem? On the other hand, how have we recognized God's messages and kingdom, and how can we continue to do so?

Commentary 3

This text reminds us of Jesus' daily ministry in the face of his approaching passion.

Context:

In Luke 9:51, Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem where he knew that he would face opposition from religious leaders and eventually death (9:22). Along the way, he demonstrates the presence of God's kingdom through repeated deliverance from demons and healing from sickness. Crowds of people from Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem follow Jesus along his journey. Today, Jesus might have a host of social media followers tracking his journey on foot from Galilee to Jerusalem and turning out to see him in person as he passed near their town. Wherever Jesus goes, he brings signs of God's kingdom.

Jesus' daily ministry:

Every day (what Jesus described as “today and tomorrow”), Jesus is about the work of healing and deliverance. Since the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4), this has been the work that Jesus has done. There are specific stories of Jesus’ deliverances in a synagogue (4:33), among the tombs (Luke 8:27-39), and generally among the crowds who came to see him (4:41). Jesus also gives his disciples power to enact deliverance (9:1; 10:17) and explains that deliverance is a sign of God’s kingdom breaking into this world (12:20). Similarly, Jesus has healed many people (4:40) sometimes without regard for the appropriate time and place. He has healed in the synagogues and on the Sabbath, and these very actions bring criticism from the religious authorities (6:7). And Jesus sends his disciples out to heal (9:2). Healing and deliverance are central aspects of Jesus’ message and daily work, and they are still available today. As preachers, we might think about the need for healing and deliverance *within* the church as well as for those who are not yet part of God’s people.

Jesus’ approaching passion:

As Jesus goes about his daily work of healing and deliverance, he is also keenly aware of his destination. There are two senses here. He knows he is headed to Jerusalem *and* to his death. While Herod (the same ruler who had John the Baptist beheaded) wants to kill Jesus, it is clear that Jesus is in charge of his own timetable. Today and tomorrow Jesus will continue his daily work, and Jesus is the one who will complete that work. It will be completed on the third day. The third day is an allusion to

Jesus' resurrection (Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7). Jesus' work of healing and deliverance does not end with his crucifixion. No. It is made perfect and complete by his resurrection. Although Jesus is aware that he is traveling towards Jerusalem -- a city with a hostile record towards prophets -- his work will not be undone by death. Rather, it will be completed by resurrection. As we contemplate Jesus' passion during Lent, let us also remember that Jesus' death was only one part of the process by which Jesus completes his work of deliverance and healing among his people. Attention to his death should not exclude reflection on his resurrection during this season.

Jesus' longing:

Jesus is headed towards the historic seat of Jewish power where both kings and priests have their home. Prophetic ministry in the face of power is a dangerous activity that jeopardizes the lives of those who would speak the truth of God's kingdom to the powers that be. Jesus is no exception. But what is surprising is Jesus' reaction. He characterizes the city as killing prophets and apostles ("those who are sent," Luke 13:34), but his response is the compassion of a mother. Jesus longs to gather Jerusalem under his wings (v. 34). Jesus longs to comfort those who would reject him. He envisions Jerusalem as a brood of vulnerable chicks in need of their mother's protection and longs to offer the same protection, salvation, to the very city where he will die. Unfortunately, Jerusalem also has a longing. The city does not want to be gathered under the salvation of Jesus.

Desire:

In this passage, we see three examples of longing. “Want” (the word $\theta\lambda\omega$, *thelo*, may be translated as “wish,” “will,” “would,” or “desire” depending on the English translation) is used three times in this text. First, the Pharisees report that Herod *wants* to kill Jesus (v. 31). Next, Jesus tells us that he *wanted* to gather Jerusalem under his wings (v. 34). Finally, Jerusalem is described as a city that *did not want* to be gathered (v. 34). During this season of Lent, we might ask ourselves what it is that we long for and desire. Do we want to experience the ministry of Jesus even if it is uncomfortable or challenging? Or, are we tempted to respond with murderous anger (Herod) or perhaps rejection (Jerusalem)? Do we long to be like Jesus, to be able to find compassion for our enemies, even those who want to put us to death? In this world of religious and political violence, what does it mean to long for our enemies to experience Jesus’ compassion even as we ourselves have?

Consequences:

Jerusalem’s refusal to be gathered by Jesus is not without consequences. The city is described as abandoned and unable to see Jesus until the day when they receive “the one who comes in the name of the Lord” (Psalm 118:26). Although a large crowd of Jesus’ disciples will shout this same passage when Jesus rides into Jerusalem (Luke 19:38), Jerusalem itself will become the place of Jesus’ death. Those who reject Jesus’ compassionate offer of salvation, deliverance, and healing, find their city rejected,

abandoned, and left to its own devices.¹ In this season of Lent, as we contemplate the ministry and passion of Jesus, we must also remember that rejection of his ministry comes with consequences of our own choosing. Jesus' longing is to have compassion, but his longing must be met by our own longing for salvation, deliverance, and healing.

ESV Commentary

Luke 13:22–30 The Narrow Door. This account from Jesus' ministry opens with a summary ([v. 22](#)) and a question ([v. 23](#)), followed by a series of warnings ([vv. 24, 25–27, 28–29](#)) and a concluding summary ([v. 30](#)).

Luke 13:23 Jesus' response to the question—**will those who are saved be few?**—does not speculate on God's plans and actions but states what individuals should do to be “saved.” For a similar question, cf. [18:26](#).

Luke 13:24 To be “saved,” one should **strive to enter through the narrow door**. This involves repentance ([vv. 3, 5](#)) and faith ([8:12](#)). **For many ... will seek to enter and will not be able**. There will eventually be a time when the opportunity to trust in Christ will be taken away. (But see note on John 6:37.)

Luke 13:25–26 The second warning and analogy has to do with entering the **house** (i.e., the kingdom of God, [v. 28](#)) and warns that people may be shut out by the **Lord** (Jesus), in whose presence they **ate and drank** and whose teachings they heard. Listening to Jesus' teachings and sharing fellowship with his people are not by themselves any guarantee of eternal life, for that comes only through personal faith in Christ.

Luke 13:27 I do not know ... depart from me. Jesus is not only the Savior but also the final Judge of all mankind (see note on 2 Cor. 5:10).

Luke 13:28 Abraham and Isaac and Jacob (cf. [20:37](#); [Matt. 8:11](#); [Acts 3:13](#); [7:32](#)) and all the prophets ([Luke 11:50](#); [24:27](#); [Acts 3:18](#), [24](#); [10:43](#)) represent believing Israel in the kingdom of God. But those listening who did not believe in Jesus will be **cast out** or excluded.

Luke 13:29 In addition to believing Israelites ([v. 28](#)), believing Gentiles (people from the **east, west, north, and south**; cf. [Ps. 107:3](#)) will enter the kingdom (cf. [Luke 24:47](#); [Acts 1:8](#)).

Luke 13:30 will be first ... will be last.

See [Introduction: Key Themes](#); and notes on Matt. 19:30; 20:16.

Luke 13:31 At that very hour ties the present account closely with the preceding. **Herod** is Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, where Jesus likely was teaching; see notes on 3:1 and Matt. 14:1.

Luke 13:31–35 Lament over Jerusalem. As he warns his disciples about Herod Antipas and laments over Jerusalem, Jesus again emphasizes that many Israelites will be excluded from the kingdom (cf. [vv. 24](#), [25–28](#), [30](#)).

Luke 13:32 fox. A metaphor for deceitful cunning. **I cast ... perform cures** (see [4:40–41](#)) ... **finish.** The present tenses emphasize Jesus' continuing ministry. **third day.** The day of Jesus' resurrection (see [9:22](#)).

Luke 13:33 I must go. Jesus was committed to finishing his course. **Today and tomorrow** indicate a limited time

(cf. [Ex. 19:10](#)). **for it cannot be.** Herod Antipas's plotting ([Luke 13:31](#)) could not interfere with God's plan. **that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.** Jesus did not mean that no prophet had ever died outside of Jerusalem, for some had (see [2 Chron. 24:20–22](#); [Jer. 26:20–23](#); [38:4–6](#)). Rather, he was employing irony: Jerusalem, the center of Jewish religion and worship, was more dangerous to a true prophet of God than any threats from Herod in Galilee. From the time of David onward, Jerusalem was chosen by God to be the center of worship for Israel, and the center of God's unique presence and redeeming work in the world ("the city of the great King," [Matt. 5:35](#); cf. [Ps. 48:1–3](#)). Jerusalem boasted of its religious heritage as the former seat of the Davidic throne and the Solomonic temple. In the first century a.d., Herod the Great's monumental temple, along with the adjacent Antonia Fortress, served as the focal point of the city (see Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus). Under Herod, and later at the pleasure of the Romans, the Jewish high priest and Sanhedrin retained key aspects of religious leadership in the city. Herod built himself a palace at the Jaffa gate to the west. Nonetheless, after the dethroning of Herod's son Archelaus (a.d. 6; see [Matt. 2:22](#)) the city of Jerusalem was formally controlled by the Romans through their legate (except for a brief period under Agrippa I in 41–44) until the Jewish revolt (66–73).

Luke 13:34 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem (see [10:41](#)). Jesus bemoaned the fate of Jerusalem, with its inhabitants at the time being around 25,000 to 30,000 (cf. the lament in [Psalm 137](#)). His lament, however, also applied to all of Israel, since Jerusalem was the religious and political

center of the nation. **as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.** A common metaphor for loving care (cf. [Deut. 32:11](#); [Ruth 2:12](#); [Ps. 17:8](#); [36:7](#); see note on Luke 19:41).

Luke 13:35 you will not see me until you say, “Blessed ...” The quoted blessing is from [Ps. 118:26](#); it was chanted to incoming pilgrims on feast days. This is not an allusion to Palm Sunday ([Luke 19:38](#)) because in Matthew’s account ([Matt. 23:39](#)) the saying occurs after Palm Sunday, and therefore it must refer to a later event. Some interpreters understand this to refer in a negative way to a coerced, forced confession of Jesus as Lord at the time of the second coming, but the quotation from [Ps. 118:26](#) is in a positive context of welcome and worship, and the phrase “Blessed is he” implies worship. Therefore other interpreters understand this to be a prediction that a large number of Jews will trust in Jesus before his second coming (cf. [Rom. 11:12](#), [14](#), [24–27](#), [31–32](#)).