

**<sup>31</sup> At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."**

**<sup>32</sup> He replied, "Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.' <sup>33</sup> In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!"**

**<sup>34</sup> "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! <sup>35</sup> Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"**

Do you know how big the universe is? Anyone have an idea? That's okay. I don't know, either. And we shouldn't feel bad, because astrophysicists don't know, either. They've done their best to measure the observable universe, and they put that at a diameter of about 46 billion light years. In other words, if you could travel as fast as light, it would take you 46 billion years to get from one end to the other. But that's just the *observable* universe – what they can see with telescopes. How much is beyond that? No one knows. The universe is so big you can't even measure it.

The bible says the same is true of God's love for you. Paul prayed a beautiful prayer for the believers in Ephesus. More than anything else, he wanted them to "*grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.*" He prays they might be able to grasp Jesus' love for them; at the same time, he admits that they'll never be able to fully wrap their minds around it. It's just too big.

It's wonderful, isn't it? It's a truth so simple that a child can sing it: "Jesus loves me, this I know." Yet it's a love that's so profound that you can spend your whole life plumbing its depths and you won't reach the bottom, because Jesus loves you more than you could ever know.

We get to plumb the depths of it again this morning. It's a unique glimpse of Jesus' love in Luke chapter 13 that leaves us saying Jesus loves me more than I can grasp. See it in his determination to die. Hear it in his persistent pleas.

It might seem at first that the Pharisees in this lesson were being kind to Jesus. He was in Herod's territory slowly heading to Jerusalem, when they approach him and say, "**Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.**" Unfortunately, it probably wasn't kindness behind their words. Luke has already told us the Pharisees are out to get Jesus. He had upset the applecart for them – called them sinners, was stealing their limelight. He'd upset the applecart for Herod, too – was a threat to stability in his region. The problem was, Jesus was just too popular to put to death in Galilee and Perea. It'd cause a riot. But a death *threat* might scare him away. So Herod whispers one into the Pharisees' ears, and they're all too happy to bring word to Jesus. Anything to get him out of their hair.

But Jesus wouldn't budge. Did you hear his response? "**Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.'**" <sup>33</sup> Jesus would leave Herod's jurisdiction, alright. But it'd be on his timetable, not Herod's. He had work to do there yet. And a death threat didn't scare him. Dying – that was his goal! It just wouldn't happen there; it'd happen in

Jerusalem. **In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!**”

Herod, the Pharisees...they weren't the only ones who had a habit of resisting and rejecting Jesus. Jerusalem did, too. Of all places, Jerusalem should have been a safe-haven for God's messengers. The temple, priests, sacrifices were there. God's Word was taught there, God was worshipped there. If any city should welcome God's messengers, it's Jerusalem! But you heard what they tried to do with Jeremiah in the first lesson. And it wasn't just him. Time and again, prophets brought messages from God to Jerusalem. But if they upset the applecart, said something they didn't want to hear, God's people would say, “Go away” – or worse, shut them up.

Isn't that what really makes this lesson hit home with us? We can shake our heads or even shed a tear with Jesus over the people who resist and reject him today. But could it be, like then, that that includes the very people who come to worship God in his house, who hear his Word proclaimed week after week? In other words – you and me?

Like our reaction when what Jesus says upsets our applecart. When he points out our sins and calls us to change our ways. But we're quick to excuse it, slow to admit it, even slower to do anything much to change. It happens when Jesus longs to draw us closer to himself through his Word, but we're too busy with more important things to give him time in it; when his words of forgiveness fall on disinterested ears because we've heard them before or don't think we have much to forgive. It happens when we instead of fleeing to Jesus as our comfort in troubles and our security in uncertainty we look elsewhere. We might never tell Jesus to get out of our lives...but is it any better that we keep him at a safe and comfortable arm's distance?

So why was Jesus so intent on going to the epicenter of unbelief to die for people who only wanted to kill him? Or, closer to home, why was he so intent on dying for people like us who have responded to his message about sin with excuses and to his message of salvation with an unspoken but all too-clear, *I'm just way too busy to pay attention?* Well, in his words, because he had to: **I MUST keep going... today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.**

Sometimes I like to picture Jesus' face as I read his words. What was in his eyes as he said that? I see fiery determination. Nothing would keep him from Jerusalem, from the cross – not Herod, not Jerusalem's rejection, nothing. And it's a fiery determination born of burning love for you. After all, his **goal** wasn't just dying and rising again – his goal was you. He did it all for you. He loved you too much to let you go to hell for your sins. He loved you so much that he was determined to suffer that hell in your place to save you from it forever.

What kind of reckless love is that? That someone should be so resolutely determined to die on a cross and suffer hell to save people who keep him away and care so little? It's love that's wider and longer and higher and deeper than you and I will ever be able to wrap our minds around on this side of heaven. That's the kind of love Jesus has for you.

It's a love so big it didn't stop at marching on to die for sinners who care so little; it got down on its knees and pleaded with them not to push it away. Again, try to picture Jesus' face as he says the words; I see tears welling up in his eyes. **“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”**

It's a scene you might be familiar with if you grew up on a farm or raised chickens. The mother hen is out in the yard, and her chicks are scattered pecking away for food. She senses danger; a cat on the prowl, a hawk in the air. She clucks, and the chicks all come running under her wings for safety.

Only the hen is Jesus. And danger is the punishment our sins deserved. And the wings are his arms spread out on the cross winning us forgiveness and eternal safety. But instead of coming running when he calls and finding safety under his wings, Jerusalem refused. As if the wings weren't there to save them, but to smother them.

It's so unnatural, right? For chicks to run from their mom's loving call? For human beings to resist the loving voice of their Creator? It's unnatural and unreasonable in every sense of the word. But ever since Adam and Eve ran from the sound of the LORD in the garden, it's been man's default mode. And we're familiar with it by experience.

But Jesus doesn't let go so easily. Instead, he pleads. Jerusalem had killed the prophets and stoned those sent to her for hundreds of years. And they were about to do it to Jesus, too. But still, he pleaded. And however much his calls to repentance has offended you, or however much his words of forgiveness have bored you, he still pleads. He pleads with you every time you read your bible. Every time you come to church. Every time his law uncovers your sin and his gospel assures you it's taken away. He still pleads with you so that he might make your unwilling heart willing and make your apathetic heart alive and to make your doubting heart believe. Again and again he calls out, "My child, my child, your sins are forgiven. I've trampled them underfoot and hurled them into the depths of the sea. My Father didn't spare me from dying for you; he won't spare anything else, either. Come to me and find in me life to the full!"

Why should he be so persistent with you? Why should he keep coming back to you, even when you've pushed him away? Why should he care about your life, now and forever, more than you do? It's love that's wider and longer and higher and deeper than you and I will ever be able to grasp this side of heaven. That's the kind of love Jesus has for you.

And his love is not without effect. Jesus said to Jerusalem, "**Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!'**" Many would remain blind to him as Savior and continue to reject him...and they would be left with nothing. No refuge, no defense, no salvation on the day of God's wrath.

But not all. By God's grace and the Spirit's power, some would come to see him as Savior. Some would welcome him into Jerusalem as King on Palm Sunday with hearts of faith that said, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Some will welcome him with hearts of faith and those very words on the day of Judgment when he returns.

God grant that we are among them. God grant grace and the Spirit's power, so that we continue to heed his call, remain safely under his wings until he returns. When he does, we will finally be able to fully grasp how long and wide and high and deep his love for us has been all along. And we'll enjoy it forever. Amen.