

2) Abandonment Is Crushed by Determination

Luke 13:31-35 • 2022-03-13 • Lent series "Crushed"



Do you ever get the feeling like you're not wanted? The Late-Night talk-show host Conan O'Brien must have felt a little unwanted a couple years ago when the NBC network said they didn't want him as host anymore on the Tonight Show. At that time, he wrote an update to his Twitter fans: "Today I interviewed a squirrel in my backyard and then threw to commercial. Somebody help me." As it turns out he wasn't giving up on his comedy. Yet most of us I'm sure would feel rather defeated after being told on the basis of millions of TV viewers that we weren't wanted. In fact, it usually only takes a few people to tell us we're not wanted before *we give up*. What about when we are made to feel unwanted when we share something far more important than jokes? Have you ever felt unwanted because you were sharing God's Word? This morning we read from Luke 13 and marvel at how Jesus addresses the issue of people not wanting him and his Word.

Jesus was working in the region of Perea, across the Jordan from Jericho and Jerusalem. He was doing what he normally did: preaching, teaching, and performing miraculous signs. Then some Pharisees approached him and basically told him he was not wanted there. "Jesus, leave this place and go somewhere else." And they added their reason, "Herod wants to kill you." It wouldn't have been beyond Herod Antipas to utter such a threat. But it wouldn't surprise me if what those Pharisees in Perea really wanted was not to help Jesus, but to get Jesus to go out the frying pan and into their fire. They knew if they could get Jesus to continue to Jerusalem, they'd have a better chance of seeing him dead at the hands of his enemies. Either way the message is clear: Jesus was not wanted by everyone in Perea.

Jesus' response is defiant and bold. "*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.*" What Jesus is saying is, "*I don't care what cunning Herod says. I don't care what you say. I will continue to do my work whether you want me here or not.*" Should he care if some people didn't want him around? No, he remained resolute in his work despite rejection and not being wanted.

Nonetheless, Jesus' language indicates that he intended to move on in a short while. He will go to Jerusalem. Not because anyone is threatening him, but because he will carry out his work on his own time. And he knew that he would continue to face even greater rejection at Jerusalem: "*For surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!*" If they didn't like him in Perea, how much more Jerusalem! It seemingly had a monopoly on killing prophets! Jesus knew he would be so unwanted and rejected there that they would kill him. Jerusalem had long made it clear that God's messengers and his Word were unwanted. "*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,*" Jesus lamented, "*you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you.*" But that's exactly where he was headed. He had work to do and nothing could deter him from taking the hard road to carry out that work.

What is our response when someone makes us feel unwanted because we are sharing the Word of our God? Sometimes it becomes apparent that others at work or in your neighborhood don't want to hear you talking about your God. Maybe even those who are close to you feel the same. "We don't want Jesus to be shared in this house." Isn't it then that you are tempted to think, "Fine! I'll just be quiet!" What about when your nephew doesn't speak to you for four years in order to make it clear that he doesn't want you sharing God's Word with him?

We want to share Jesus with those we care about. But do they want him? "Dad, tell mom to stop telling me and the kids that we need to spend more time with Jesus! I'm a grown man with my own family and I'll make my own decisions!" We long for someone to hear the word of God and be connected to Christ! Yet also deep within us, our resolution to continue to guide them closer to Christ begins to fade and die. "If that is what they want... I guess I'll have to give up." After all, that's what they want, right? That's the easy road, right?

This is the way our hearts are! When faced with the fact that people don't want us, we grow discouraged and quickly give up. When faced with the fact that people don't want Jesus, we can sometimes just think, "Then I'll just stop trying. Our hearts don't stand up to rejection. They give up - even when doing the work of sharing God's Word.

And what about our own abandonment of Christ? There are times when vacation and recreation simply must come first. "This is my cabin up north, it's not that I don't want God around, but my family really doesn't want me dragging us to devotion time when they have vacation to enjoy." Do you have regular devotion time by yourself or with those in your household? If not, why not? Our own hearts then get discouraged and give up in the work of God's kingdom - even for our own family! Do we even realize what we are telling ourselves, what we letting others say, and what we are telling our God? "God, I don't want you in my life."

This is the tragic truth: no one can choose Jesus. But everyone can choose to reject him. And sadly, many do every day. God's grace in Jesus is not irresistible. Those who don't want us sharing God's Word with them can choose to go away from Jesus and to reject him.

For this reason, Jesus mourned over the people of Jerusalem. The people of that city displayed the same attitude as those in Perea who didn't want him around. They displayed their rejection of Jesus to the extreme measure! They rejected the great prophet from God, Christ, just as their spiritual forefathers had rejected so many of the prophets sent by God. *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who killed and stoned the prophets and all whom God sent to you! How I longed to gather you.... but you were not willing."* God sent his Word to the people. He did this because if he did not send his Word, they would never know him. But they rejected all those he had sent.

Jesus laments their rejection not because it makes him feel bad and unwanted. He laments because he knows where it leaves sinners, *"your house will be left to you desolate."* This is exactly what the prophet Jeremiah said would happen! Just like we read earlier this morning! The people of Jerusalem were told by Jesus that God would abandon them. Their house was left spiritually abandoned by God. Jerusalem was rightly mourned by Jesus. They were like the little chicks running away from the mother hen, only to be devoured by the devil and his vultures. *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem!"* - God's cry for all who stubbornly reject his grace in Jesus.

This world is filled with abandonment -even abandonment of the Word of God and his great love. But the Son of God came to crush all that abandonment with determination and with his abundant grace for sinners.

Jesus said he 'must' go on. This included not only his sharing the Word with those around him but continuing to head toward the city of Jerusalem. *"For no prophet can die outside of Jerusalem."* He is making an extreme case statement to make a point. The truth that is supposed to come out is the logical conclusion: prophets die when they go to Jerusalem. Jesus must go there to die. And why was he headed there, where he knew they would reject him and kill him? He remained unmoved in his plans because he was so moved in his love for the lost!

How much greater is his love than anything we know and are familiar with! When we face rejection and those who don't want us, we become silent, might even get upset and angry. Jesus at the face of rejection grew more compassionate, continued to send his messengers to Jerusalem, and longed to gather them under his love!

Such love is far beyond anything we display to those who don't want us! Even though they had killed the prophets Jesus still sent them over and over and then came longing for lost sinners. Jesus cries out, *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often I have longed to gather you as a hen gathers her young under her wings."* He wanted even those *who hated him* to be gathered once for all under the loving protection that he provided for all people! He longed **to protect** those people of Jerusalem who would kill him. He longed to protect them from the devil's lies, from the curse of sin, from the fear of death and hell. Instead of hating God and rejecting him, he wanted them to experience God's love. Instead of being in an abandoned house without God, he wanted them shielded under God's eternal love!

That protecting and shielding love was **displayed on the cross!** Picture the hands of Christ protecting his people as they rejected and killed him. And even while the nails were driven into his flesh his words were *"Father forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing."* He was taking the beatings, the humiliation, the taunts, the blows, and even pouring out his blood--this was all done because he longed to protect even those who stood under his bloody arms mocking him and hating him! To protect these from the blows and curses and destruction of sin, he took his arm and covered them along with all sinners to take the blows in their place. For all the times we abandoned our God he came determined to give us his grace and love. He protected you under his loving arms like a mother hen protects her chicks. Despite your abandonment, he did this in his great mercy to save you from the devil, sin, and hell.

This protection was won **for the entire world**—even those who don't want Jesus. **That is why God continued to send his messengers** to the lost. The evangelist Stephen, perhaps one who would have been even more known than Paul had he lived longer, was sent to these same people. (Ac 7:51-52) *"You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit! Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him."* They rejected and killed Stephen. But God never stopped longing for his people. He never stopped sending his Word.

And even till this day the world around you makes it clear they don't want you sharing Jesus. But regarding those too Jesus cries, *"How often I have longed to gather you under my protection!"* So, his messengers are still sent. After all, God did not send Jerusalem prophet after prophet because they accepted them. No, it was because he in his great love longed for the people who lost. It is the same today. God still sends his Word to those who by nature not only don't want it but hates it! God longs to gather them under his loving care too! Now we long for those still lost without this amazing message of Jesus' love and protection! We long for them to know his great longing for a world that rejects him! We long for them to be included under his protection.

Finally, with such love we long for Jesus! Come, Lord, Jesus. We know we will see him come again. Then he will not come unwanted or rejected. But everyone will bow before him as Lord of all. On the third day, he completed his goal and rose to life. Then we will cry, *"Blessed is the one who comes to Save! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Our LORD Jesus!"*