

God's Will When I Am Not Willing

*"...how often I have longed to gather your children
together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings,
but you were not willing!"*
Luke 13:34

Sunday, April 4th
Palm Sunday
Major Gerald (Gary) Reilly
The Salvation Army
Mississippi-Rideau Lakes Corps

God's Will When We are Not Willing

200404

Luke 13:31-35

Today is the day we would normally celebrate the triumphal entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. We would sing Hosanna songs, and the sanctuary would be decorated with palm branches and bright colors. It seems surreal that today is Palm Sunday. Here we are in April of 2020 and I am asking myself, what ever happened to March? Even with an added day in February (which is strangely called a 'leap' year), the steady march (pardon the pun) of time always seems to catch us unawares. Calendars should come with little stickers that warn: dates on this calendar are closer than they appear. To make matters worse for me, I tend to procrastinate. I live the old Spanish proverb: Tomorrow is often the busiest day of the week.

I know I'm not the only one that struggles in this way. The struggle with procrastination is aptly illustrated by a student in this unknown magazine article:

A paper is assigned, a month before the due date. I dutifully write down the date on a scrap of paper and shove it in my notebook. It's a long-term assignment, so I don't have to worry about it right away. The countdown begins.

T-minus five days: I go to the library to find a topic. After checking my email and talking to the library assistant about her date last Friday, I sit down with a blank sheet of paper and a freshly sharpened pencil. Is that a tickle I feel in the back of my throat? I get up and find the water fountain. Strolling aback past the rows of books, I can't imagine how I am supposed to pick just one tiny topic. Exhausted from the unfairness of it all, I decide to pack it in for the day.

T-minus four days: I sit down at the desk in my bedroom with the same blank sheet of paper and the same pencil. Whoops-same tickle too. I get up to get a drink of water and sit back down. I call a friend to see if she has started; she is already finished, so I hang up on her. I call another friend I KNOW hasn't started. "Isn't this assignment stupid?" I ask. "Yeah. And dumb," she answers. After an hour of "misery loves company," I get another drink of water and sit down to concentrate. Looking up I notice how dirty my ceiling fan is...

[T-minus three days and T-minus two days follow similar patterns of delay, until finally...]

T-minus one day: Nobody works well on an empty stomach, so I take my time at dinner. Back in my room, I decide to brush my teeth. I look at my tongue in the mirror. Where did all those little bumps come from? And there are so many of them! one, two, three... Finally, I sit down with my blank sheet of paper and the not so freshly sharpened pencil. I start writing...a letter to a friend I met in fifth grade at summer camp. Hey, relationships are important! Finished (with the letter, not the paper), I get up to get a drink of water. I sit back down and begin to panic. To calm myself, I play a game of solitaire on my computer (I win). I get a drink of water, reread the assignment, and write my name on the paper. Then I notice my CDs are disorganized, so I arrange them in alphabetical order. I go to the bathroom. Back in my room, I lie on the floor and moan about the injustice of it all. Knowing the end is near, I jump up and begin to write. Hours later, I collapse on my bed-just in time to shut off my alarm.

Due date! When I get to school, I grumble about how I had to stay up all night, slaving away, just to finish the stupid paper. Then the teacher assigns another one. And believe me, I have learned my lesson! I write down the new due date and carefully file the assignment in my notebook. I will get started right away. But first I need a drink of water...¹

Can you sympathize with our ever-delaying sister? It was Mark Twain who advised: "Never put off until tomorrow what you can do the day after tomorrow." We might laugh and joke about our

penchant for putting things off, but dangerously we carry the same habit into the most important sphere of our lives—and I say most important because it has, quite literally, eternal consequences.

Procrastination

Our text from Luke records, “At that time...” Right away we wonder, at what time? Well, we are reminded in verse 22 of the thirteenth chapter, that Luke is describing events as “...**Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.**” It’s ‘that time’ which began back in Luke 9:51, where we are told, “**As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.**” That word ‘resolutely’ certainly carries an air of determination. *The Message* renders it “he steeled himself for the journey.” The journey contains many instances of Jesus telling stories and having encounters were Luke reminds us repeatedly that decisions need to be made, and that time is running out. This is most clear in the encounter immediately before ‘that time’, when Jesus bluntly states:

24 “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. 25 Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Sir, open the door for us.’ “But he will answer, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’” (Luke 13:24-25)

Jesus increases this tension with time by answering the Pharisees warning: “**I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day reach my goal.**” His repeating indicates its importance. (Luke 13:32-33) In fact, notice that Jesus says “I must...” That is determination. What He *must* do is stated in other places:

Luke 4:43, “**I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God...**”

Luke 9:22, “**The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.**”

Jesus had this single-minded determination, this sense of must, that drove Him onward to His goal, so that John could say Jesus on the cross, “Knowing that all was now completed...” Jesus had accomplished the will of God, a will He had submitted to the night before while in the garden. A will He had submitted to His entire life. A will that He assumed as His own, so that He could say with God:

The Statement

“...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!”

In this statement we see very clearly the conflict of two wills. There is the will of God to gather us, to bring us into relationship, to bring us under his protection – and the will of man which is expressed by our unwillingness to submit to God’s will. The Greek word translated ‘not willing’ is “the absolute negative”, rendered in other translations as “you would have none of it” (NET), “you would never have it” (Php), “you refused and turned away” (Msg), and “you would not have it” (NASB). Very simply, what God wants, is what we refuse.

God’s will

In the journey of Jesus to Jerusalem we see the God’s will expressed in the determination of Jesus, His unwavering commitment to reach his goal. His heart expressed in that “**As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it.**” (Luke 19:41) Not long before this journey began He had warned his followers, “**The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the**

hands of men.” (Luke 9:44) And yet He pressed on – and His goal was not just reaching Jerusalem. His goal was to complete the will of the Father. Not even the sly devices of a Herod could deter Him from the goal. One commentator quipping: “...the death which Herod threatens is the death which Jerusalem will provide.”

The story of our salvation has a long history reaching all the way back to our first parents, where God spared them from suffering immediately the penalty of sin, but instead provided them with a covering, but the provision of that covering required the spilling of blood. We see this all through the sacrificial system of the temple – each sacrifice a reminder of the awful cost of sin. And though we repeatedly have ‘not willed’ the will of God, still He has been patient with us, and provided many ways and many times for us to come to salvation.

I received an email this past week from a fellow Officer, Major Greg McInnes, Director of Chaplaincy & Anti-Human Trafficking Advocate within the Correctional & Justice Services. He related how just days before, *The Passion of the Christ* had been shown to inmates, and as a result three inmates felt their hearts warmed (as we saw of Lydia last week), and these men gave their lives to Christ. One man in particular was being broken, for he had begun to believe the lies he had been told all his life, that he was worthless. But then witnessing the determination of Jesus in going to the cross – for him – his eyes were opened to the extent of God’s love for him, and the realization that in God’s eyes He was of incredible worth, and through tears accepted the will of God, and was gathered under His wings.

That is God’s will for everyone, to gather us under his wings. However, too often, we have “refused and turned away.” Determined to go our own way.

Our Unwillingness

There was Adam and Eve in the garden, who wanted for nothing, and yet could not abide by the will of God that they not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There was Israel, rescued from slavery in Egypt and God willed that know His law that they might live by it, but they were unwilling. Then came the arrival on the border of the Promised land and God willed they go and take it, but they would have none of it. And though time and again he rescued them through the times of the judges and the kings, still they rebelled. Still they were unwilling.

But what of us? Are we any different? Chuck Colson writes: Christianity must evoke from the believer the same response it drew from the first disciples: a passionate desire to obey and please God—a willingly entered-into discipline.”² Even though God has demonstrated His love and mercy for us, and extends grace time and again, pouring out His Holy Spirit upon us to bring us a time of refreshing, still we are not willing. And even when we are willing or willingness is intertwined with our unwillingness. In Romans 7, Paul lays out the struggles of wanting to do good and doing evil; and of not wanting to do evil but doing it anyway. We struggle to bring our will in line to God’s will.

The Pharisees often get a bad rap, and though in some cases justified, they *were* trying to live righteous lives, striving to be godly. They knew all too well what God’s will was, summarized by the prophet Micah, “*The LORD God has told us what is right and what he demands: “See that justice is done, let mercy be your first concern, and humbly obey your God.*” (Micah 6:8 Contemporary English Version) Yet they struggled with each of those elements, because they willed differently than God.

William Barclay claims that there were seven common classes of Pharisees known by the people in Jesus day, one of them the Bleeding and Bruised Pharisees. They received that name because of the pride by which they displayed various bumps, bruises, scratches and cuts

they received from bumping into and tripping over objects while their eyes were closed. You see, righteousness for them was to not look upon women. They knew God wanted justice, mercy, and humility – but they weren't willing to just receive the approval of the Father, they also wanted the approval of an audience. And so even in their willingness they were unwilling.

Are we any different? Is it any wonder David prayed for a “willing spirit to sustain me.” Have you ever noticed that the blessing received on a Sunday, or after the determination fired up by powerful time of prayer, or perhaps the passion aroused by personal devotions, begins to wane, to fade, and before long we fall back into old habits. Oh how we need that willing spirit to sustain us, to keep us keeping on.

Lord's Prayer

After ‘Now I lay me down to sleep,’ the next prayer we learn is probably the most dangerous prayer to ever pray. Do you recognize the danger in the Lord's Prayer? Do you realize how dangerous it is to pray, “Thy will be done as it is in Heaven”? Do you think in Heaven, God ever hears: “in just a minute,” or “can you get someone else,” “I'm too busy”, or “No, I don't want to”?

There is a sense in which God's will is done now on earth by us and through us. It is us, God's church that is to be the city on a hill. It is the church, you and me, who are God's ambassadors to the world. When we pray “Thy will be done,” do we do the will of God? Kyle Idleman makes an interesting observation on a question posed to Israel by Joshua. He assembled the people at Shechem and said:

“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.”

Joshua 24:14-15

Notice that Joshua presents just two options. Either you serve the gods of the earth, or you serve the God of Heaven. He doesn't give the option to serve no god. Whether aware or not, all of us serve a god, even if that god is self – my desires, my possessions, my popularity, my family. All of us serve something. All of us bend to the will of something. So, to whose will are you bending? Joshua made a decision that day that he and his family were going to do the will of God. Have you decided whose will it will be?

Being unwilling for too long

I'd like to go back to Herod for a moment, for he started this whole conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees. The next time Herod enters into Luke's gospel Jesus has been arrested and now stands before him. Luke tells us, “*When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him.*” (Luke 23:8) Think about that for a second. For a long time, for three years, he had wanted to see Jesus. What had stopped him? He knew where Jesus could be found. He was surely aware that Jesus had entered into Jerusalem that very week. So why not go to see for himself, hear for himself? Why wait?

Herod and no Comment

Luke reveals a horrifying spectre here in the court of Herod. He tells us when Jesus was brought before him, “[Herod] plied [Jesus] with many questions, but Jesus gave no answer.”

(Luke 23:9) Jesus said nothing. Someone has warned: “A man may get into such a condition when he yields to the base, that even Christ has nothing to say to him.”

For Herod the door had been shut. Unwilling to give up his decadent lifestyle and his unholy marriage, he had first murdered John the Baptist, and then he had put off until another day seeing Jesus. Herod was too concerned about Herod in the ‘here and now’ to give thought to what would happen to Herod in the ‘there and then’.

Procrastination not so cute

Jesus highlights several times on His journey to Jerusalem that a decision must be made, and that the clock is ticking. Is it not strange that we have a sense of urgency when the game clock is running down. We even get warned when there is only a minute to go. People will yell, “Shoot, shoot!” even if they are thousands of miles away watching on television (who can hear except for a poor wife) because they know that time is running out, and after the buzzer sounds it will be too late.

I don’t know if it’s the final minute, or the final game, or the final season – but what I do know is that today you can make a decision that will change your life forever. Why procrastinate? Why allow your heart to harden a little bit more than yesterday? Time will eventually run out – Jesus cannot be any clearer about that - and there will come a time when Jesus will have nothing further to say.

But its not today. He is calling you right now. Through Isaiah God promises, “If you are willing and obedient, you will eat from the best in the land.”

Almost persuaded, harvest is past;
Almost persuaded, doom comes at last.
Almost cannot avail,
Almost is sure to fail,
Sad, sad, that bitter wail,
Almost but lost.³

It is God’s will that everyone be saved. Are you willing?

Cutting Room Floor

(other musings and notes from sources)

³¹ ***At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, “Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.”***

³² ***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.’***

- Jesus authority and purpose came from a much higher throne than that of Herod's
- “At that time” begs the question, at what time?
- V22 reminds us that Jesus is way to Jerusalem^a while making His way through the towns and villages, teaching as He goes
- Teaching on what?
 - Has been rejected at a Samaritan village
 - Encountered three men who though wanting to follow, had excuses to do so later
 - Has sent out the 72, reliant only upon others and God (take nothing with you) telling them: Luke 10:16, “He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” (see Lk 11:28)
 - Been critical of those looking for signs – the only sign they get is the sign of Jonah (remarkable in itself for Jonah did not work any signs, but simply preached the message he had been given). Often we think only about the three days in the great fish
 - Chastised those who are more concerned with externals rather than the heart
 - Given the ‘woe’ message which brought about fierce opposition amongst the Pharisees
 - Warned against having too earthly a mindset, ie: concerned with getting and having stuff
 - Learn to discern “this present time”
 - Urged listeners to “make every effort to enter through the narrow door” (Lk 13:24)
- So immediately before being warned of Herod's plot, Jesus warning about a door that will be closed, and once closed there is no opportunity to enter through that door. He had been at that time teaching on the Kingdom of God
- “
- “...the death which Herod threatens is the death which Jerusalem will provide.”⁴
- Luke 19:41, “As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it.”
- In Matthews gospel it comes as the conclusion to the ‘woe’ speech, directed at the religious authorities
- For ‘goal’ see: John 5:36; 17:4; 19:28; Heb 2:10

³³ ***In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!***

³⁴ ***“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!***

- possible that Jesus had other visits to Jerusalem that are not mentioned in the gospels, in addition, as a devout Jewish man Jesus surely would have made visits prior to His years of ministry, even then aware He was to be about His Father's business (see Luke 2:41-52)
- have you ever experienced the pain of reaching out to someone only to be spurned?
- not willing” (v24) translated as

^a This journey began back in Luke 9:51

- “none of it” NET
- “not willing” ESV
- “you would not have it” Php
- “you refused and turned away” Msg
- “you would not have it” NASB

³⁵ **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.’”**

- “your house” and its desolation speaks of the destruction of the temple in AD70
- Jesus must have been speaking in a figurative way since they would indeed see him before the triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. There is an obvious deeper meaning in Jesus words.

C.S. Lewis, who called Christ the hound of Heaven because of His relentless pursuit of Lewis’ soul, writes of his conversion:

*In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all of England...The Prodigal Son at least walked home on his own feet. But who can duly adore that Love which will open the thigh gates to a prodigal who is brought in kicking, struggling, resentful, and darting his eyes in every direction for a chance to escape? The hardness of God is kinder than the softness of men, and His compulsion is our liberation.*⁶

C.S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy

Kenneth L. Barker, et al⁶

- “The saved are those who seize the opportunity now.” (259)
- Jesus not as concerned about the how many (v23) as He is about the who (v24)
- No nefarious motive to the warning from the Pharisees, they appear to be genuinely concerned for Jesus’ safety (259)
- Last time Herod mentioned was Luke 9:7-9
- Today the fox connotes cleverness; in Jesus day they also connoted insignificance (see Neh 4:3; SS 2:15)
- Today and tomorrow, as well as third day, not to be taken literally
- The goal was the cross
- All four gospels record the “Blessed is He....” quote from Ps 118

William Barclay⁷

- We often take too harsh a posture with the Pharisees due to over emphasis on their opposition to Jesus
- Leans more towards the Pharisees giving a sincere warning to Jesus
- Seven classifications of Pharisees known in Jesus time (191)
 1. The Shoulder Pharisee: all about externals, wore their deeds on their shoulders

2. The Wait a Little Pharisee: could always come up with a reason to defer doing good
 3. The Bruised or Bleeding Pharisee: having taken extraordinary precautions in avoiding women these giants of faith prided themselves in the bruises, cuts and scratches they made sure people saw, accrued from banging into things and tripping over objects because they had been walking with closed eyes
 4. Pestle and Mortar Pharisee (humped back): would often go about doubled over in an effort to demonstrate their humility
 5. Ever-Reckoning Pharisee: maintained a balance sheet mentality regarding the performance of good deeds
 6. Timid or Fearing Pharisee: ever afraid of transgressing the law (either written or oral) they had become “not helped but haunted” by their faith
 7. God Loving Pharisee: those who were deemed “copies of Abraham” by how they lived and treated others
- fox (191):
 - regarded as sliest of animals
 - most destructive of animals
 - symbol of worthlessness or insignificance
 - illustrates Jesus attitude with story from Hugh Latimer, who while preaching in Westminster Abby in the presence of King Henry VIII, was reported to have said: “Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! Be careful what you say. The king of England is here. Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! Be careful what you say. The King of kings is here!” (192)

Robert C. Tannehill⁸

- “We cannot be sure of the Pharisees motives in warning Jesus about Herod.” (223)
- In beheading John the Baptist, Herod numbered himself among those who murdered the prophets
- Comparing verses 32 and 33, both speak in a different way about three days
- “They are days of journeying toward Jerusalem and so not cover the whole time until Jesus death.” (224)
- The “emotionally charged double address” (224) of verse 34 anticipates Luke 19:41-44
- “you will not see me again” (v35) must mean “You will not see me properly” (224) or “you will not recognize me”
- See Psalm 118
- Peter acknowledges a future fulfilment in Acts 3:19-21
- Looks to another day when He will truly be seen and welcomed as the reigning King

Leon Morris⁹

- The Pharisees were used by Herod to send a warning to Jesus, to pass along the death threat (249)
- “fox” symbolizes, 1) a sly man, 2) worthless man, 3) a man who was sometimes destructive (249)
- It is an unusual statement of contempt, the only one uttered by Jesus against an individual
- Third day indicates a short time
- Jesus will determine events, not Herod
- The Greek ‘*dei*’, translated ‘must’ (v33) is indicative of the strong sense of necessity as to how Jesus views His mission
- Luke mentions Jerusalem by name almost twice as much in his Gospel as all the other gospels combined. Jerusalem is made central to his account of Jesus life, and the resistance he experienced

- More visits must have been made that were not recorded (250)
- For the protective mother hen see Psalm 57:1, *“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.”*
- “The responsibility of the Jews for their fate is sheeted home with the final ‘you would not.’” (250)
- House speaks more so to entire city rather than just the temple
- That God no longer will live in Jerusalem – “left you desolate”
 - “all that is left is yourselves, and your house.” Phillips
 - “Look, your house is forsaken!” NET
 - “your house is abandoned and empty.” The Voice
- The latter clause of v35 speaks to the second advent

Norval Geldenhuys¹⁰

- Suggests possible motive for the warning was to impel Jesus to leave Herod’s jurisdiction (Galilee and Perea) so as to fall into the hands of the authorities (382)
- Takes the view that the warning was sincere, whether real or imagined
- V34, Jesus knows all too well the heart of God for this city and its people, who have been warned and protected on many occasions as God offered redemption
- Yet no matter how often “they persistently opposed Him” (383)
- “Christ longs earnestly for the salvation of those who are lost; but when man is determined in his refusal to believe Him, [Jesus] ultimately leaves him to final destruction.” (383)
- “at that time” indicates a relation to that which precedes this encounter
- The tone of Jesus remark regarding Herod is striking in light of the later encounter described by Luke: *“When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, **because for a long time he had been wanting to see him.**”* (Luke 23:8)
- T.W. Manson: “A man may get into such a condition when he yields to the base, that even Christ has nothing to say to him.” (384)
- T.W. Manson: “the preceding passages suggest that the meaning is: ‘The time will come when you will be ready to say to Me, “Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord,” but it will be too late.’” (385)

Warren Wiersbe¹¹

- Trying to frighten Jesus away
- Notes that at one time Herod had been eager to meet Jesus, but never took initiative to seek Him out, the result was a heart that grew more hard
- The fox statement is “holy sarcasm”
- The fox “went hunting in darkness!” (227)
- v34 looks back to Lk 11:47-51
- some see “wings” as a reference to the cherubim in the Holy of Holies (see ex 25:20; also Ruth 2:12)
- lament addressed to the nation
- ‘house’ refers to both the family of Jacob – “the house of Israel” – and to the temple – “the house of God.” (Zech 12:10);

Endnotes

-
- ¹ <http://www.angelfire.com/oh3/smo/procrastination.html>
 - ² Charles W Colson, *Loving God* (p. 52). Zondervan. Kindle Edition.
 - ³ <https://mobileapps.usawest.org/SongBookPlusSongDetails.aspx?searchmode=true&ID=171>
 - ⁴ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (p. 173). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.
 - ⁵ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (Great Britain: Fontana Books, 1969), 182-183.
 - ⁶ Barker, Kenneth L. and John R. Kohlenberger III, ed's., NIV Bible Commentary, Vol 1: New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing house, 1994).
 - ⁷ Barclay, William. The Gospel of Luke: The Daily Study Bible, 6th impression. Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1961.
 - ⁸ Tannehill, Robert C. Abingdon New Testament Commentaries, Luke. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.
 - ⁹ Morris, Leon. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Vol. 3, Luke, rev. ed. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988. Reprint, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994.
 - ¹⁰ Geldenhuys, Norval. The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Gospel of Luke. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1951.
 - ¹¹ Wiersbe, Warren W. The Bible Exposition Commentary, Vol. 1, Matthew-Galatians. Wheaton: Victor Books, 1989.