

“The Pain of Rejection”

Luke 13:31-35

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

First Baptist Church

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Let’s talk about rejection this morning. It is one of the most painful words in our vocabulary and always associated with broken dreams and disappointment.

Who among us has not felt the sting of rejection? How old were you the first time you experienced it?

Were you one of the children on the playground who was not picked to play on a team, or the one who did not get an invitation to a birthday party when it seemed all your friends did?

As a teenager, did you have the love of your life dump you for the new kid who moved to town?

Were you turned down for a scholarship or not admitted to the college of your choice?

Did someone else get the job you interviewed for or the promotion you were certain was coming your way?

Did your mate leave you for someone else and file for divorce?

You have never forgotten those painful memories, and exactly how you felt, have you? Rejection has this kind of power, doesn’t it?

Would it help you to know Jesus understands, and he knows what it feels like to be rejected and shunned? It does me.

Our text today tells us about the rejection Jesus encountered after he began his public ministry. The first is not a surprise; the second one may be, though.

Some Pharisees came to Jesus and strongly encouraged him to leave Galilee because his life was in danger. Herod, the ruler over that region, made it known he wanted to kill Jesus.

Were these Pharisees sincere in their attempt to protect Jesus, or was this their way of getting him out of their area? I’m going to give them the benefit of the doubt. I believe there

were Pharisees, like Nicodemus, who admired and respected Jesus, and appreciated the work he was doing. Surely, not all Pharisees were like the jealous ones who laid traps for Jesus and wanted to humiliate him.

Jesus bristled when he heard this alarming news from the Pharisees, calling Herod a fox, which was not a term of endearment. Calling someone a fox was a way of saying they were devious, mischievous, conniving, and at times, evil and destructive.

In no uncertain terms, Jesus told the Pharisees to tell Herod he would not run him out of Galilee or prevent him from making life better for the people who needed his help. He would do the work God sent him to do, boldly moving about without fear.

Luke followed this story with another one about rejection. It is a lament in which Jesus mourns the reception he received from his own people. In spite of the fact he loved them and wanted more than anything to protect them like a mother hen does her chicks, they treated him with disdain like they did the prophets who preceded him.

What do you think Luke's message was to his readers, including us? I think there were several.

Nothing of value comes easily. It did not for Jesus and will not for us.

Even when doing good deeds and helping others, resistance will come. Some people will not appreciate you or support your efforts. To the contrary, they will try to stop you.

Be as bold and courageous as Jesus was when this occurs. Press on. Persevere. Don't shrink in fear and give up.

In light of this, where are you experiencing resistance now? Is it at home, at work, in school or in the community? Jesus understands, so look to him for guidance and strength.

Surround yourself with people who appreciate your efforts and will encourage you. This was the role Luke was playing in his readers' lives. Make room for these people in your life, too.

In addition, I sense Luke was encouraging his readers to be good listeners, especially if someone loved them enough to offer constructive criticism. The failure to do so would not only keep them from achieving their potential, but it would also break someone's heart who wanted the best for them. Listen for the compassion and disappointment in Jesus' words.

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often I have desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" Luke 13:34.

I am intrigued by this lament, and what it tells me about people who were unwilling to listen to Jesus, and the impact this had upon him. It raises a question I have grappled with throughout my ministry.

Why are people unwilling to let others help them live up to their potential and be used by God to make the world better? It appears Jesus even struggled with this question. His only mission was to reflect the heart and character of God and show his people how to live in peace, yet they rejected him, especially the leaders.

Why were they so blind and stubborn? Why would they not listen to Jesus and learn from him how to live in harmony with their neighbors? Why would they not follow his advice and example?

I could understand why Herod, the secular leader would not, but the religious leaders? Why did they turn on Jesus?

Jesus saw the world differently than they did and practiced his faith in a way which exposed their hypocrisy. He loved the people they did not. He accepted people they excluded. He talked to people they ignored. He healed people they would not touch. He taught people they considered inferior. He forgave people they held grudges against. He criticized the people they coddled. He gave all he had to the poor instead of taking all they had to make his life easier.

Jesus turned their world upside down with his insistence on serving rather than be served and responding to everyone's plight, and they wanted no part of it. They had no desire to be this unselfish and inclusive and were in no mood to change their ways to reflect the heart and nature of God. They were quite content to stay the way they were.

How did this make Jesus feel? It broke his heart. He saw an opportunity being wasted to change the world for the better for all people and all times, and it grieved him. Life did not have to continue as it had been for centuries; it could have been so much better for everyone.

Jesus wasn't angry and vengeful, though; ready to rain down fire on his enemies. He was filled with love and sadness, just like his heavenly Father, and wept over his enemies.

Why will people not accept help from those who love them and want the best for them? I pondered this question a lot last week? No doubt all of us have reached out to someone we love dearly, only to be rejected. It hurts, doesn't it? It's frustrating, isn't it, as we see so much wasted potential.

You may be going through this now with a loved one who is struggling. All your attempts to help him or her have been in vain.

I wonder how many people reached out to Mindy McCready before she took her life a few days ago. Once again, a young, beautiful, talented celebrity committed suicide, abruptly leaving two little boys and a family who loved her. She was only thirty-seven and had so much potential. Last week, I suspect many of her friends and family members voiced a lament similar to the one Jesus spoke over Jerusalem. Perhaps you have said the same thing recently.

Why do people refuse help, especially from well-intentioned friends and family members? Perhaps they are living in denial and don't think anything is wrong. This is a strong coping mechanism, you know.

Maybe they have become addicted to their lifestyle and don't want to change, even though they know it would be better to do so. Change is hard. It requires honesty, confession, repentance and discipline. It is much easier to leave things as they are, and hope they will magically get better.

Sometimes people refuse help because they have too much pride to admit they need help. Receiving help is a sign of weakness to them. They would rather live in misery or die than acknowledge their vulnerability.

Others have lost hope of a better life. They cannot envision living any other way.

Some people don't feel they deserve help as they struggle with low self-esteem. Good things are meant for others, not them.

There is any number of reasons people refuse help, none of which is easy to overcome.

What do you do when someone will not let you help them? What did Jesus do? He did not give up. Read the rest of Luke's gospel. Jesus continued to pray for and reach out to his people, even the leaders.

He was persistent, yet sensitive to their needs and wishes. He did not force himself upon them, but neither did he forget them. He modeled the change he wanted them to make, hoping this would inspire and motivate them.

He also moved on to the people who welcomed him and responded to his help. There were plenty of people who did receive him, so he refused to become cynical or bitter and ignore them. He did what he could instead of becoming paralyzed by what he couldn't do, and there was plenty to do.

Is this what you need to do? Do you need to pray daily for those who are not ready to receive your help and continue being a good role model? Do you need to reach out to family members and friends who will receive your help?

God will help you, just as He did Jesus. Talk to Him about this now.

On the other hand, who has not given up on you? Who prays for you every day? Who wants to help you achieve your potential?

Will you put down your defenses this morning and admit your problems are bigger than you are? Will you ask God to help you open your life to those who are reaching out to you and listen to them?

Don't waste this opportunity, which is sure to break someone's heart. I have to believe this is what Mindy McCready would tell you if she were here. I know it is what Jesus would advise you to do.