

Destiny Based On Desire

As we look into the passage before us today, we perceive the sovereign plan of God unfolding. The Father is moving all the pieces of the world's Chess Board into position and His plan is in motion, it is His plan and nothing can change it. Herod is ready to kill Jesus. The Pharisees are scheming how to eliminate Jesus. Jerusalem is the focus for Jesus and his travel is taking him ever closer. Jerusalem is where evil men will betray God and murder His Son on the cross. But the sad reality is that the Jews are not ready to surrender to God and believe in His Son as their Savior. In their rebellion they will not turn to Christ in faith and it is faith that brings repentance unto salvation. Everything is in place for the salvation of man - except man is not interested.

There is a Greek word that appears in this passage, "*Thelei*". This word is significant because it has a deep meaning, much deeper than the English word implies. Verse 31 reads, "Herod **wants to kill you.**" That statement sounds calm, but using the Greek "*Thelei*" instead of the English word "*want*" it means to have a great desire or ambition with great effort or something that must happen or one's complete energy will be poured into this goal until it is completed. We will see this word appear three times in the text and each time it serves as a marker or sign.

PRAY

The Desire to Kill Jesus

We begin with verse 31, "At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, 'Get away from here, for Herod **wants** or *thelei* to kill you.'" At first glance,

it may seem as if these particular Pharisees were doing Jesus a favor in warning Him that Herod Antipas was determined to kill him. It may seem so on the surface, however, as we proceed with Luke's account it will become clear that these Pharisees were, in fact, in alliance with Herod.

The language in the original is so strong, it could be rendered, "Herod *must* kill You." Herod's desire (*thelei*) to kill Jesus was all consuming, He was beginning to be like a rabid dog snarling and foaming at the mouth with vengeance against Christ, no longer aware of what else is happening in Israel, he was fixated on this one thing. The message Jesus brought had enraged Herod to the point of unbridled hate fueled by fear.

So, I want you to understand that these religious leaders were not being kind to Jesus. The truth is, they wanted Jesus to be gone, as much, as Herod did. They saw Jesus as a bigger threat to their religious system than He was to Herod's throne. Wherever Jesus went, preaching the Kingdom of God and repentance, the need for a formal system based on works and a religion of rules instead of relationship with God, grew less and less. The more Jesus proved to the people his divinity and truthfulness; namely that He is the Son of God and He was sent from God the Father, the less both Herod and the Pharisees desired to have Jesus around. You see, Jesus was simply bad for business. Their hopes were - by revealing Herod's aggression towards Christ - that it would drive Jesus away. He would run for his life to some obscure location, maybe back to the little backwater village of Nazareth located in the unimportant district of Galilee. They wanted Him out of their territory to maintain their position of power over the people and additionally it would gain them favor with Herod. They failed to recognize the Word of God was being fulfilled. Matthew wrote and quoted the Prophet Micah one of the minor prophets of the Old Testament and a contemporary of Isaiah, Amos and Hosea.

³“When Herod the king heard this (*referring to the birth of Jesus, the Messiah*), he was troubled, and **all Jerusalem with him** (*meaning the leaders and the people*);
⁴and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet *Micah*: ⁶“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.” ’ ’ (Matthew 2:3-6)

Understanding the Old Testament, we see in this verse that the sovereign plan of God is unfolding. People are being put in place and raised up to murder Jesus. Only the death of God’s only begotten Son could atone for the sin of all mankind. If - if God is in control of everything and the Scriptures tells us He is, then he uses the corruptness of the Pharisees and Herod with their hearts of stone to allow them the desire to kill Jesus. This is what God did with Pharaoh; He used Pharaoh’s hard and corrupt heart as the instrument to resist letting the Hebrews go, so that, it would be clear - it was an act of God when Pharaoh finally let God’s people go. This is how Paul revealed it, “**For the Scripture** (*the Word of God*) **says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.’** ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.” (Romans 9:17-18) God is in control of all people, good and evil. All people do the Lord’s will whether they realize it or not. God’s plan of redemption cannot be stopped.

Jesus Desires Jerusalem

Reading Jesus’ response to the Pharisees, in verse 32, “**Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.** ³³ Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow

and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.” While their motivation for warning Jesus is questionable, what I want us to see in these two verses specifically is that Jesus is not afraid. Luke continues to remind his readers that central to Jesus’ mission is God the Father’s divine purpose. So, while Jesus has turned His attention to travel to Jerusalem, it is not only His geographical destination but it is where His mission be completed. Jesus is not afraid of Herod because God is in control and Herod will do exactly as God has determined. Herod is but a divine tool to be picked up or laid down depending on God’s purposes.

When Jesus says, ³² “Go and tell that fox” it had deep meaning for his audience. The word “fox” was used by the Jews as a symbol of a sly man, but more often for an insignificant or worthless man. It was also a symbol of destructiveness. To call Herod “that fox” is as much as to say he is neither a great man nor a straight man; he has neither majesty nor honor. This expression is contemptuous. Later, in chapter 23 of Luke, we read that Herod wanted to see Jesus perform a miracle and yet when Jesus stood before Herod, he said nothing to him at all. When Jesus has nothing to say to a man, well then, that man’s position is hopeless. The fact that Jesus says he will continue to cast out demons and heal meant Jesus will continue his ministry and do so without fear of the Herod or the Pharisees. Jesus is also making it clear that his performing miraculous signs of God will not last indefinitely. Jesus says in verse 32, “the third day I finish my course. The “third day” means in a short time or at the end of a definite time. At the appointed time Jesus will ‘be finished’. The word finished in the Greek denotes the end of his work, his mission is fully accomplished. Jesus is saying that he will complete his allotted course. God, not Herod, will determine when he is to die. The divine plan of God will be fulfilled. By saying this, it is like Jesus is saying, “You go back

where you came from and tell Herod that I am going to complete my mission in spite of him and you.”

Jesus was fearless in the face of this real threat, he responds, **“Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.”** Jesus did not fear because He continued to entrust Himself to the Father. Jesus knew He needed to continue His mission and He could do so because the Father also had a mission; God the Father’s mission was to keep Jesus alive until it was time for the cross.

We see a common desire by all parties, but with a contrast of purpose. The common desire was the Pharisees and Jesus wanted to leave. However, Jesus’ desire to leave is not based on any threat from them or from Herod. The contrast of purpose is that Jesus’ desire to leave is based on God’s will and not threats. The Pharisees wanted him to leave because they were threatened.

Jesus continues to educate and inform these Pharisees in verse 33, **“Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.”** So, whose agenda is being served by Jesus’ travelling out of their region and onto Jerusalem? God’s agenda is being served and his plan would be finalized in Jerusalem. They would murder Jesus as the many prophets of God before, but Jesus was no prophet, he was God, very God, the promised Messiah.

The capital, Jerusalem, was the heart of the nation; it was there that was Jesus’ destiny and that of God’s prophets before him, it was there that men had slain those sent by God. This may be the reason for Luke’s strong interest in Jerusalem. He has the name ‘Jerusalem’ ninety times in his gospel account, while it occurs only forty-nine times in all the rest of the New Testament. It was at

Jerusalem, before the Sanhedrin, that trials of prophets took place. It was there that the nation's attitude towards Jesus would take its final shape and that his death takes place accomplishing God's purpose. Jerusalem condemns Jesus who was innocent and slays the King of the universe. When Jerusalem judges Jesus, God judges it. God will judge all those who oppose him - including America.

Jesus Desires to Save Sinners

In verse 34 we have the second use of this verb *Thelei* - Jesus desires or *Thelei* to gather and save sinners. Reading verse 34, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!” Here in context, Jesus desires to receive His own people - the Jews. Jesus' outpouring of sadness and grief toward the capitol city of Israel shows that He understands that they will not come to Him in repentance and faith. Even though He has healed their sick and taught them the Word of God, they will still kill Him in Jerusalem. Jesus voices lament or sadness for Jerusalem for Jerusalem is a signifier of His love for Israel and it also signifies their stiff-necked rebellion towards God.

Take notice of the imagery Jesus uses to show His caring love for the people, saying, “How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings.” Jesus, is pictured as the mother hen and the people of Jerusalem as the baby chicks. When danger occurs either from a chicken hawk or from bad weather, the mother hen gives a certain cluck and the babies come running. She opens her wings and wraps them around the little ones for protection and once the chicks are protected, she walks and guides the chicks to a place of shelter. Jesus tells the Pharisees and the people that His desire was to do

this for His own people. Jesus' desire to save the people is as strong and emphatic as Herod's desire to kill him, the difference is Jesus serves God the Father and will save all those the Father has chosen. At the time of Christ and of the first century church and all through history to "the present time **there is a remnant, chosen by grace.** ⁶ But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace." (Romans 11:5-6)

Here is a difficult situation that only God will resolve; Herod desires to kill Jesus ... the Pharisees desire for Jesus to leave ... Jesus desires for people to come and be saved.

I want to pause for a moment here because there is something unnatural at work in the hearts of lost sinners. It is normal for a baby chick to run to its mother for protection. But here in Jesus' story, we see baby chicks or the lost people in grave eternal danger, but they would rather take their chances with the chicken hawk or the fox which present the evil and corrupt Herod and Pharisees rather than to run to their God who will wrap them in His wings.

Chickens do not rebel against their instincts. However, with people it is different. Fallen man is so rebellious at heart that he will not run to Christ for protection but instead suffer the eternal consequences of refusing to trust in Christ to save them from the wrath to come. Because of the combination of free will and sin, mankind is attracted to the prince of this world who is the very source of evil. Sinners desire sin more than they desire Jesus.

One thing that is different from a baby chick and people - is the day-old chick recognizes his mother's cluck for danger and comes, but people, when they hear the Gospel do not think the danger is real. A chick knows it had better high

tail it to safety but the evil one has convinced people the danger is not real or that the danger is not an immediate threat.

Sinners Do Not Desire Jesus

Jesus laments over Jerusalem and the people of Israel and then pronounces judgment, back to verse 34, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”³⁵ Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’” Here we see the third use of our Greek word *Thelei*... “you were not willing!”

As a consequence of its rejection of Jesus, Jerusalem will be judged, in verse 35, “Behold, your house is forsaken.” This is language God has spoken before to the Israelites through the prophet Jeremiah. God said through his prophet to the people of Judah, “if you will not obey these words, I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation.” (Jeremiah 22:5) History shows us that Judah ended. We do not know for certain, but tradition and extra-biblical writings tell us that Jeremiah was stoned by his fellow Jews in Egypt – there is a long tradition of Israel killing those sent by God. Back to the Christ.

Their rejection of the Messiah, Jesus Christ will be the last straw. God will withdraw His presence and leave them to their own devices and history tells the truth of Christ’s judgement. The Jew’s history is a tragic story. Jerusalem would be the beginning. They meet with a devastating end. Their beloved temple would be destroyed – the very place where their religion had turned into a lost system of man-made rules and laws that did not save. The temple was formerly called the house of God, but no longer. God leaves and left them to them to their sin.

As we bring to an end this morning's message, it is important for us to see that there was nothing more powerful than Jesus' desire to face the cross. This is a stronger desire than Herod's desire to kill Him. And yet, in God's providence both would work to serve His purposes. Jesus would travel to the cross to give His life as a ransom for many and those in leadership would execute Christ. Notice also, that Jesus' desire to receive sinners is as strong as Herod's desire to kill him.

Now, with all these opposing forces working toward the same goal, the cross was coming into view. Everything is being put into place for the salvation of sinners. The only thing that keeps a sinner from being saved is that they want or *thelei* the temporary things of the world. They do not desire Christ, but love their sin more.

There is a universal call that goes out into the entire world and with the universal call comes a paradoxical tension. Jesus calls all people to Himself in a general call, come to Me. Yet, they can only come if God grants them faith to believe. Let me close by reading a collection of the words of God, Jesus states, "All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:27-28) "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me,⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." (John 5:39-40) "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ... No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:37 & 44)

I a few days we celebrate the birth of the Savior of the world. Born of a virgin, who lived a sinless life, died, was buried, but rose from the dead to live eternally. But, today is the day – the Lord desires none should perish! The most important question, for those who have not taken Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior is - Will you come to Christ and receive eternal life?