

Near the Cross 4: CONFRONTING OPPOSITION
Luke 13:31-35 (3/6/16)

Our text for this morning is found in **Luke 13:31-35**. As Jesus is drawing ever nearer to Jerusalem and His cross, we find Him confronting opposition along the way. Let's take a look:

³¹At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, "Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you." ³²He 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.' ³³In 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! ³⁵Look, 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.'"

Jesus knows where he's going; and He understands what will happen to him when he gets there. Still, He continues His journey. He's on a mission to reconcile people to God—the most important mission ever assigned anyone. No wonder Jesus encountered so much opposition.

King Herod's armies tried to kill Jesus at birth. The people of His own hometown turned on him and tried to throw Him over a cliff. His disciples betrayed him and deserted him. Yet Jesus completed every task the Heavenly Father assigned Him.

If Jesus encountered opposition in His life, shouldn't you and I expect some as well? I think we should; and Jesus provides a model of what to do in the face of opposition. There are four lessons in this passage that I believe we'll find helpful.

1. First, When Confronting Opposition, Be Courageous. A group of Pharisees came to Jesus and urged him to leave the area because Herod intended to kill him. Now, it's not clear if this was true, or if those leaders themselves wanted Jesus gone.

The Pharisees were no friends of Herod, and there's no reason to believe they were concerned about Jesus' safety either. They were, in all likelihood, acting out of their own self-interest—namely, they were trying to convince Jesus to just go away.

Whatever their motives were, it's obvious that Jesus was running into some stiff opposition. It's also clear that Jesus would not be intimidated by their threats.

He called Herod a "fox." By the way, this had nothing to do with "good looks." Instead, it referred to a person's "slyness," or--and this may be how it's used here--the Pharisees would use it to refer to someone they saw as insignificant or inferior. It was an insult.

We're not sure how Jesus was using the word here or what He was implying about Herod. What is clear is that Jesus shows no signs of fear in the face of this opposition. He lets the Pharisees know that He has every intention of staying his course and finishing what He came to do.

Anytime we set goals for ourselves, when we are committed to accomplishing something, we can anticipate some problems. The only way to avoid this is never to seek to accomplish anything.

Young people, if you aim to finish in the top 10% of your class, or to captain your team, or to be first chair in band--I promise you, there will be other students who share that same goal. You're not likely to be the only one vying for this honor.

That's just another form of resistance. You shouldn't fear it. Embrace the competition as part of living and growing and pursuing your goals in life!

I watched a news clip about blind people who were being taught how to snow ski. I happen to enjoy skiing; but it's hard enough for people who can see. Imagine being blind and doing it!

Paired with sighted skiers, however, these visually-impaired people were skiing. First they were taught how turn and stop. Then they were taken to the slopes where their sighted partners skied beside them shouting, "Left" and "Right" and "Stop."

Following those commands, they were able to make their way down the slope. They depended completely on their instructors to guide them. They had to put total trust in their guides.

Now, sort of like those blind skiers, we all face obstacles in life. We have to decide how to handle them. How we negotiate these twists and turns, the ups and downs of living, is determined in large measure by what we believe and who we trust.

Nobody expects blind people to ski, but they can. So what is there in our lives—what opposing force could be overcome by simply trusting God more—trusting Him who sees what we cannot see to guide us through whatever obstacles we face? Jesus demonstrated great courage in the face of opposition. We can too!

2. Next, When Confronting Opposition, Assess Your Abilities.

The Lord is always ready to help us, but He doesn't ask any of us to perform beyond the abilities He's given us.

If you stand "4 foot eleven," your goal of playing on the high school volleyball team may be a bit lofty—since you obviously...are not! And you shouldn't expect to play first chair whatever if you're tone deaf.

What I'm saying is there are tasks that we can accomplish...and others that we probably can't. It depends on our abilities, our circumstances, on lots of factors, coupled with the strength and guidance we receive from the Lord and also from those significant others who surround our lives.

Don't underestimate your abilities. At the same time, be careful not to over-estimate them either. Look inside your own mind and heart and figure out which way of thinking most gets in your way.

In other words, do you usually find yourself thinking "I cannot," or..."I will not?" Some struggle with feelings of "I can't," while others have to deal with an attitude that insists "I won't!"

We have to take an honest look at ourselves when we assess our abilities. It also helps to get the advice of people who know us. They may point out abilities we didn't realize we had. Or they may need to be honest enough with us to help us "get real" about some ability we just think we have...but don't.

In either case, we've learned something helpful. We've gained some insight for setting goals and finding the pursuits in life that are right for us.

When the Pharisees confronted Jesus and told him to leave town, Jesus quickly assessed his abilities. "I'm casting out demons and performing cures," he said (v. 32).

Then he added, "On the third day, I finish my work" (v. 32). Jesus was confident that He could finish the job He had come to do.

There was something else Jesus wanted to do, though. He said of Jerusalem, "**How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings...**" (v.34).

But in this case, Jesus had to recognize the limits of his abilities. He wanted to save them--and He could have--but, He says with deep regrets, "**You were not willing**" (v. 34).

He wouldn't force them. Salvation was theirs for the asking, but they had to choose to receive it. Sadly, their hearts were hardened against Him: "You were not...willing."

Each of us needs to assess our abilities! This may mean we have to forfeit some plans, set different goals, raise our sights, or perhaps...lower them.

Do this well and the result will be a greater confidence to pursue the things that are in keeping with God's design for our lives.

3. Now, a third lesson we find here. When Confronting Opposition, Examine Your Motives. Why is it that we want to accomplish certain things in life? What "lies beneath" these goals that we set for ourselves—or for others (e.g., our children)?

Motives matter. Jesus was always getting at what motivated people to do what they do, and He has the same concerns for our lives today.

Pure motives instill confidence within us. But if we are attempting something—even something good—for the wrong reasons, it will lead to both worry and weariness. It's important to ask ourselves, and give honest answers to the "whys" behind our actions.

Jesus' cry of anguish over Jerusalem revealed His true motives. This showed His great love for the city. His heart was heavy. He wanted to spare the people of Jerusalem from this judgment.

His motivation was so strong, He was willing to take up the cross in an effort to turn them back to God—but they rejected His offer. They rejected Him!

But the purity of Jesus' motives, the amazing depth of his love, gave Him the courage to continue his journey to Jerusalem, even though He knew this was taking Him ever nearer the cross.

Remember that Jesus had nothing to gain for himself in this—which, honestly, is the primary motivation in most of our lives—self-interest. It's powerful! But Jesus did what He did only because of what He could do for others. His motives were pure.

It's always good to do some self-assessment to determine what it is that motivates us. This is especially important, though, when we have a specific goal or task before us, but we're confronting opposition.

There could be good reason for it. Maybe others see what we cannot—that our motives are unworthy.

"Poor" motives...need to be replaced by "pure" motives. This could mean that we have to change what we're attempting to do. But if, on the other hand, our motives are good, we will be encouraged and empowered to keep going, to keep giving our best to the task.

Okay, we're learning from Jesus about confronting opposition. So far, our Lord has taught us about...

- 1) ...being courageous;
- 2) ...assessing our abilities; and...
- 3) ...examining our motives.

4. Let's add one more lesson that grows out of this passage: **When Confronting Opposition, Define Your Mission.** What I mean by this is that we need to be sure that whatever we have defined as our mission or adopted as our goal in life is right for us.

Jesus shows us here a clear understanding of His goals—His life's mission. He has a plan, both short-term and long-term. Jesus said He would continue to teach and heal while spending the next three days moving ever closer to Jerusalem.

Listen to what he says in verse 33: **"...I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!**

He stopped to minister to people along the way, but Jesus kept his ultimate goal in mind. He would go to Jerusalem, and there he would die as an atoning sacrifice for our sin.

Others tried to stop him. There was resistance all along the way; but Jesus was courageous. He was focused. He knew his mission and stuck with it until it was finished.

Friends, you and I have a mission in this world. If we follow Jesus Christ, He'll have something for us to do. The world keeps trying to persuade us to adopt its goals, which ultimately lead nowhere.

But when we choose to follow Jesus, He helps us to discover our mission in life--a mission that leads to the abundant life that our Heavenly Father wants for all of His children.

- 1) Jesus Christ fills us with the courage to face resistance—pressures, temptations, obstacles of whatever kind.
- 2) He helps us discover our abilities, and to get real honest about our motives.
- 3) He invites us to follow him; and by doing so, to pursue life at its best.

Right now, if you've never trusted in Christ, He wants to give you the courage to take that first step of faith. He will, if you ask him.

Or it may be He wants you to take that next step of uniting with his church here, joining hands with the rest of us in mission and fellowship.

Maybe He wants you to step out in faith into some new ministry He has in mind for you.

If you're hearing his call in your life today, answer it! Have the faith to respond.

Open your life to this loving Savior, and Christ Jesus will give you the courage to say "yes" to him and to follow Him wherever He leads.

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