

Jesus between the Seasons: HIS COURAGE

Luke 13:31-35

Today we continue our look at Jesus' life and ministry between the seasons of Christmas and Easter. And we return once again to the Gospel of Luke to do this.

Let's go ahead and look at our text in **Luke 13:31-35**, where we find a very courageous Jesus:

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. He understands what will happen to him when he gets there. So it takes tremendous courage for Jesus to continue on his journey toward Jerusalem and the cross.

God sent His Son to this world to bring light into dark places, to produce peace where anger and hatred rule, to put sin-shattered lives back together again, reconciling God and people.

Never has anyone had a more important mission. At the same time, never has anyone met with so much opposition.

The king and his armies tried to kill Jesus at birth. The people in his own hometown turned on him. Even his closest followers betrayed him and deserted him in his time of greatest need.

Yet everything that the Heavenly Father assigned His Son to do was accomplished. Later, when Jesus cried out from the cross, "It's finished," it was!

What I want us to see today is how Jesus provides for us a model of courage. We need this because there are times when you and I have to be courageous. This may a time in your life right now when a big dose of courage will be required just to get you through what you're facing. And if not now—sometime...

I want to suggest to you four ways in which Jesus demonstrates His courage—doing so with the hope that we can learn from his example how to be more courageous.

1. First, I invite you to see in Jesus **COURAGE when Facing Resistance.** We've already mentioned the resistance Jesus experienced. It seems a fair question that if Jesus encountered obstacles in his life, shouldn't you and I expect a few as well?

In our text, a group of Pharisees came to Jesus and told him to leave the area. The reason they gave was that Herod intended to kill him. Now, it's not entirely clear if this was true, or if the leaders themselves just wanted Jesus gone.

It would be out of character for Pharisees to do something to assist Herod, and we have no reason to believe they were concerned with Jesus' safety either. In all likelihood, they were acting out of their own self-interest.

Jesus hadn't had a very good track record with the Pharisees, so I think it's safe to assume that this was really about them--and not Jesus. They were the ones who wanted Jesus to go away.

Whatever their true motives, though, it's obvious that Jesus was running into some stiff resistance from these Pharisees. It's also clear that he was not intimidated by their threats.

Did you hear what Jesus said? He called Herod a "fox." I promise you this had nothing to do with "good looks" in that day.

The term was used, even back then, as a reference to a person's "slyness." But Pharisees would use the word "fox" to refer to someone they saw as insignificant or inferior to themselves.

It's not quite clear how Jesus was using the word or what he intended to imply about Herod. What is clear is that Jesus shows no signs of fear in the face of Pharisees' resistance. He lets them know that he has every intention of staying his course and completing what he came to this earth to do.

Anytime we set goals for ourselves, or we have something that we intend to accomplish, we might as well anticipate some problems along the way. The only way to avoid all resistance is never to seek to accomplish anything.

Young people, if you aim to finish in the top 10% of your class--or be valedictorian, for that matter--I promise you, there will be other students who share that same goal. If you want to play on the volleyball team or play first chair trumpet in the band, you won't be the only one vying for this honor.

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

Some time back, I watched a television program that featured blind people being taught how to snow ski—as impossible as that sounds. Now, I happen to enjoy skiing; but it's hard enough for a person who can see. Imagine being blind and trying to ski.

Paired with sighted skiers, though, these blind skiers were taught how turn and how to stop. When they mastered those skills, they were taken to the slopes where their sighted partners skied along beside them shouting, "Left" and "Right" and "Stop."

As they obeyed those commands, they were able to negotiate their way down the slope, depending completely on their instructors to guide them. They had to choose between total trust or the very high probability that they would fall or worse.

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. It takes great courage, combined with tremendous trust, but it can be done.

What is there in our lives—something that appears to be such a barrier—but it could be overcome through the courage gained

from trusting the Lord—simply trusting him to guide us through whatever obstacles we face. Jesus shows us how to be courageous when facing resistance.

2. Now let's look at something else we find here in Jesus. I'll call this **COURAGE when Assessing Abilities**. Our courage is misplaced if what we are attempting to do is out of our reach.

If you're "4 foot seven," for example, your goal of playing on the high school volleyball team may be a bit too lofty—since you obviously are not! And you shouldn't expect to play first chair whatever if, so far, you haven't played any instrument at all.

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, guidance, and giftedness we receive from the Lord.

We all need to take care that we don't underestimate our abilities. At the same time, we must be careful not to over-estimate them.

When trying to assess our abilities, we have to look inside our minds and hearts and figure out which way of thinking most gets in our way. In other words, do we usually find ourselves thinking "I cannot," or "I will not"—I can't, or I won't???

We have to take an honest look at ourselves when we assess our abilities. Often it helps to get the people who know us best to chime in as well.

They may point out abilities we didn't realize we had. Or we may get them to be honest enough with us to finally help us "get real" about some ability we just think we have...but really don't.

In either case, we've learned something helpful about ourselves. We've gained some courage when it comes to assessing our abilities and finding the right goals and pursuits for our lives.

In the process, we may find the courage to set our sights higher. Or it may be the courage to be more realistic about ourselves and set them lower. We may like one outcome better than the other, but we will find doing this helpful either way.

When the Pharisees confronted Jesus and told him to leave town, Jesus quickly, courageously, and accurately 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 assessed his abilities. Then he knew, he was confident, that he could finish the job he came to do.

There was something else Jesus knew he was capable of doing. 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). Jesus knew he could have protected them from judgment just as a mother hen is able to keep her chicks from harm.

Here was a case, however, where Jesus recognized the limits of his abilities—self-imposed limits, I believe, but still limits. He wanted to save them, and he could have saved them; but, he says, “You were not willing” (v. 34).

He would not force them. His salvation was theirs for the asking, but they had to choose to receive it. Sadly, their hearts were hardened. “You were not willing,” he said.

Assess your abilities courageously, friends! This may mean you have to forfeit some plans, set different goals, raise your sights, or maybe...lower them.

But do this well and you will emerge from the process with greater confidence—and courage—to pursue those things that are in keeping with God’s plan for your life.

3. Let’s consider another aspect of this: **COURAGE when Examining Motives**. Why do we want to accomplish certain things? What lies beneath the goals we’ve set for our lives?

Motives are important. Jesus was always getting at what motivated people to do what they do, and he has the same concerns about our lives today.

Pure motives will instill courage within us. But if we are attempting something—even something good—for the wrong reasons, we will quickly grow weary and fearful. It’s important to ask ourselves, and honestly answer, why we are doing what we’re doing.

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

His motivation was so strong he was willing to die on a cross in order 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 would take him to the cross.

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

It's always good to do a little self-assessment in order to determine what it is that motivates us. This is especially important, though, when we have a specific goal or task before us. If our courage is waning, it could be we have a motivational problem—that our motives are unworthy.

"Poor" motives need to be replaced by "pure" motives—which may mean we have to change what it is we're attempting to do. But if our motives are right, we will be encouraged and empowered to keep going, to keep giving our best.

Okay, we're learning from Jesus how to be courageous. So far, the Lord's taught us about being courageous...

- 1) ...when we're facing resistance,
- 2) ...when we're assessing our abilities, and...
- 3) ...when we're examining our motives.

4. Let's add one more lesson that grows out of this passage: **COURAGE when Defining 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 a clear understanding of his goals. He has a plan, both short-term and long-term. He would continue to teach and heal as he spent the next three days traveling 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, he'll have something for us to do. The world keeps trying to persuade us to adopt its goals, which get us nowhere.

But when we choose to follow Jesus, he helps us discover our mission in life--a mission that leads to the abundant life our Heavenly Father wants for all 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—and 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 a 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 the Savior; and Christ Jesus will give you the courage to say "yes" to him and to follow him wherever he leads.