

Second Sunday of Lent
March 7, 2004
Luke 13:31-35

Sermon by Pastor Paul Janke

Success Is Doing God's Will

1. Expect Opposition
2. Expect Vindication

*^{NIV} **Luke 13:31** 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.'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!"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.'"*

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Was Jesus a success? Our immediate answer is Yes. He's our Savior. He's our God. He lived for us. He died for us. He conquered sin, death, and hell. Of course he was a success.

But the success of Jesus is not readily apparent in today's Gospel. We see Jesus here encountering opposition to his ministry from the government (King Herod) and from the religious establishment (the Pharisees). More than that, Jesus himself comments on the widespread resistance to his ministry in the capital city, Jerusalem. You can't help but conclude that there were more than a few people that Jesus didn't succeed in winning over. But this is where our definition of success is important. Dale Carnegie calls his bestselling book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, "a blueprint for success." The promise of the book is that it will "increase your popularity," "help you to win people to your way of thinking," "keep your human contacts smooth and pleasant," and "arouse enthusiasm among your associates." If you compare what Carnegie promises to do with the way things are going for Jesus here at the end of Luke 13, you wonder if maybe you should give Jesus a copy of the book.

Let me assure you, I believe wholeheartedly that Jesus was a success. But what counts for success in the world and what counts for success in God's sight are often two different things. Success for Jesus meant achieving the goal that God set for him, the goal of redeeming us and all mankind from our sins. As he went after that goal, doing the will of his Father, there were clearly times when Jesus didn't look much like a success. And there will be times when the same is true for us: doing God's will won't have us sporting all the earmarks of worldly success. But as we see in our Gospel today, **SUCCESS IS DOING GOD'S WILL**. Jesus shows us that when we do God's will, we can 1] expect opposition, and 2] we can expect vindication.

1. Expect Opposition

We read, *"At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, 'Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.'"* Jesus was in Perea, region east of the Jordan River ruled by King Herod Antipas. One day some Pharisees show up to warn Jesus that he's on Herod's hit list. Now this is the same Herod who had issued the order to behead John the Baptist, so a warning about his deadly intentions has to be taken seriously. But it's strange that this warning should come from the Pharisees. Their sect was hardly known for its interest in Jesus' welfare. Mark's Gospel says the Pharisees were actually conspiring with the Herodians to kill Jesus. It's likely that the Pharisees here were simply trying to get Jesus to leave Herod's territory and go to Jerusalem, which was a hotbed of opposition to Jesus. There they could more easily arrest Jesus.

At any rate, their gambit didn't work. Jesus wasn't intimidated. He replies, *"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.'"* Herod truly was as sly as a fox, but his cleverness was no match for Jesus' determination. Jesus was like the captain of a ship who lashes himself to the helm. There would be no turning back, no bailing out. Jesus was determined to do his Father's will. What the Father wanted was nothing less than a full-scale invasion of Satan's kingdom. As he drove out demons and healed people, Jesus was fighting the skirmishes that would climax at the cross. Christ's goal was to ransom us from sin and death on the strength of his sinless life and sacrificial death. That would be success.

Yes, Jesus would leave, but on his own timetable. And when he left it would not be to go into hiding but to bring this epic struggle to a close in Jerusalem. *"In any case,"* Jesus said, *"I must keep going today and*

tomorrow, and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!” The growing opposition and the open talk of his death might make it seem as if Jesus was flirting with failure, but you hear in these words a steadfast determination to reach the goal for which he’d been sent into this world. Every obstacle would be surmounted. Every opponent would be overwhelmed. Then there would be success.

Success as the world defines it is something you can touch and see. Success is stylish clothing, late model cars and fine homes. Dale Carnegie couches his definition of success in terms of human relations. It’s understanding and getting along with people; making people like you; winning others to your way of thinking. And I don’t mean to disparage the book. It has common sense insights on improving the way we deal with people. As important as relations with other people are, however, it’s even more important to do God’s will. That’s where our Christian definition of success differs from the world’s definition. For us, success is confessing Jesus as our Lord and Savior. For us, the path to success lies in honoring this loving Savior by living according to his will and aligning our priorities with his. And if this makes us the odd man out, if this causes us to be unpopular or even disliked and persecuted, so be it. Jesus teaches us that those who set a course to do God’s will must expect opposition.

Running into opposition from someone as morally impaired as Herod is one thing, but what’s truly sad is to see how Jesus ran into opposition from his own, from Jerusalem and its inhabitants. The mention of Jerusalem and the prospect of dying there, cause Jesus to say, *“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!”* What a sad image this is. Here’s a Savior who dotes on the welfare of his people like a mother hen sheltering her brood. But his efforts meet only with rejection. They seemed to ignore his miracles while accusing him of laboring on the Sabbath. They neglected his gracious, life-giving words and accused him of consorting with sinners. Finally, they dealt him the ultimate rejection and clamored to have him crucified. The apostle John summed it up this way: **“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”** (John 1:11) It was as the LORD had said through Isaiah centuries before, **“All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations—a people who provoke me to my very face.”** (Is. 65:2)

There's sorrow in the Savior's voice as he says, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem." Jesus is mourning for the people who have rejected him. It's sobering to see our Savior like this. It's a caution. Certainly we don't ever want to be among those who cause Jesus to sorrow. There's a verse in the psalms that sounds the same note of warning: "**Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.**" (Ps. 95:7-8)

But the unmistakable sorrow in the voice of our Savior is also comforting. It's comforting to know that our Lord is so earnest in seeking our salvation that the thought of rejection reduces him to sorrow—not on account of his own personal feelings of rejection—but on account of the fate that awaits those who reject him. Martin Luther said once, "When you look at a hen and her chicks, you see a picture of Christ and yourself better than any painter could paint." Christ's compassionate concern for us is exemplified in a story of how lightning once struck a farmer's henhouse. The chicken coop burst into flames. The volunteer fire department was summoned, but by the time they arrived it was too late to save the chickens. As the dejected farmer poked through the ashes, he found the charred carcass of one of his hens. But when he moved the blackened remains of the hen, he discovered that underneath her were six chicks that had survived the fire. The mother hen had, in time of danger, gathered her chicks under her wings. And that's what Jesus desires to do for us. His invitation to trust him, to come to him and have life and forgiveness, is a call to find refuge in the shelter of his wings. And Jesus and his angels rejoice when hear and believe that call and take refuge in him.

Buying into the Bible's definition of success requires faith. So often it seems to be the unbelievers, the skeptics and the scoffers, who experience success. But Jesus assures us that the time will come when he will be proven right. Expect to be vindicated, he says.

2. Expect to be Vindicated

It was no mere fire in a henhouse that Jesus was warning about here. It was destruction on a massive scale. He predicted, "*Look, your house is left to you desolate.*" Only about forty years after Jesus spoke these words the Romans did achieve the desolation of the house of Israel. The destruction of Jerusalem was as horrible as it was complete. The warning words of Jesus were no false alarm.

Jesus goes on to say, "*I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'*" The day will come when even the most hard-hearted skeptic will have to

acknowledge that Jesus' words of warning were accurate. But that day will be the last day of this world's history and then it will be too late to turn to God in repentance. Now in faith or later in fear, but one way or another everyone will bend the knee before Jesus. At his trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus reminded his accusers of the prophecy of Daniel. He said, **"In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."** (Matt. 26:64) On that day Jesus will be vindicated as the success that he always has been. Every kind of opposition will melt before his majesty.

And that is also the day on which we who belong to Christ will experience our vindication. Sometimes the cause of Christ seems so weak and powerless. We set out to serve our Savior and end up receiving heaping helpings of scorn. We take it on faith that success is doing God's will, but we're troubled by the failures. If Christ is the King, then why must I have so much sorrow? Why don't our efforts at serving him result in more visible success? All we can do at these times of opposition and apparent failure is to look to Jesus. Trust him. Trust him especially in the difficult times. Trust his promise that unbelief and opposition won't have the last word. Jesus, our King, is going to have the last word and he's already told us what it is: **"Well done, good and faithful servant! Come and share your master's happiness!"** (Matt. 25:21)

This is the goal all of us as Christians are striving for. This is finally the only kind of success that matters: sharing the happiness of our Master Jesus in heaven. But we could never hope to have this success if Jesus had not been so stalwart in facing the opposition to his work of redeeming us. It's as we trust in Jesus' success that we find the ultimate success, through opposition to a glorious vindication on the day he comes for us. Amen.