

## **“Tough Love”**

### **Luke 13:31-35**

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The headline caught my attention. “Teens: Middle Class with Caring Parents.” This described the two Barbie Bandits that held up a bank in nearby Acworth on Tuesday. Their pictures were scattered in newspapers all over the world because what they did was so bizarre. Disguised only by large sunglasses, the two young women walked into a large grocery store and approached the teller at a Bank of America branch. While smiling and at times giggling, they handed him a note demanding money and made off with an undisclosed amount of cash. Two days later they were arrested, along with two bank employees that masterminded the robbery.

I was intrigued by the way neighbors and friends described the recent Gwinnett County high school graduates. “All-American girls,” was what people said. “They used to baby-sit for parents in the neighborhood.” Then one neighbor said what I suspected all along. “Heather came from a good family and her parents have tried everything to get their daughter off drugs.”

**Who needs your help but will not accept it?** You have reached out to this person in a variety of ways and times, but to no avail. Repeatedly, he or she has spurned your efforts.

Are you struggling with a rebellious son that is spiraling out of control? He is making so many foolish decisions and ignoring your pleas to change. He is going to crash and burn if he doesn't listen to someone, and you seem helpless to prevent it.

Is your daughter pushing the envelope and flirting with risk and danger? Does she lash out at you when you try to warn her? Is it impossible to have a civil discourse?

Has your mate turned into a monster that hurts you and is destroying your home? Your pleas for dialogue and change have gone unanswered.

Do you have a friend at work or school that is headed down the wrong road? You are concerned about him or her and have tried to talk, but they will not listen.

**How do you feel when someone you love will not listen to you and accept your help?** Are you frustrated, angry and broken hearted? Sure you are.

Would it help to know that Jesus understands how you feel because he has been where you are?

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills prophets and stones those that are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you,” Luke 13:34-35a.

Luke recorded these words of Jesus in a larger body of material known as the Lucan travel narrative, Luke 9:51-19:27. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, teaching his disciples and healing the sick along the way. When he was warned to leave Galilee because his life was in danger, he replied that this was not the place he would die, but Jerusalem. The very people that he came to help would reject his offer and turn on him as they had other prophets. This led him to voice great sorrow over their rejection. You can hear it in his words, which were similar in form to David's heartbroken lament over the death of his son, Absalom.

“O my son Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom! Would God I had died for you!” II Samuel 18:33. Jesus repeated the word Jerusalem in his lament for the same reason David repeated his son's name. His heart was broken.

**What did Jesus want to do for his people?** He wanted to watch over and protect them like a mother hen does her chicks, which was a common metaphor for God in the Old Testament, especially in Psalms. They would not let him, though.

What is Luke's message for us this morning? **Not everyone you love will let you help them and few things will cause you more pain and agony.** I suspect most of you understand what I mean. Your love has been spurned at one time or another.

**Why will people that we love not let us help them?** Why was Jesus rejected? I am sure there were many reasons. Perhaps people did not see the need for making changes in their lives. They could not see what misplaced priorities, toxic values and unwise decisions were doing to them.

Others did not like what Jesus was saying. It appeared Herod did not along with many of the religious leaders that tried to appease him. Jesus' message called for justice and mercy. It encouraged self-examination and an adjustment of values and priorities. It demanded new ways of thinking, living and relating to others. This was offensive and difficult, especially for leaders looking for ways to manipulate people rather than help them.

Besides, as Barbara Brown Taylor suggests, most people were unwilling to give up a fox for a hen, the descriptions used in this passage for Herod and Jesus. Who could blame them? Consider the contrast, Taylor writes, "Jesus had disciples; Herod had soldiers. Jesus served; Herod ruled. Jesus prayed for his enemies; Herod killed his. In a contrast between a fox and a chicken, on whom would you bet?"

No doubt many of the people Jesus tried to reach were heavily influenced by those that were exploiting them, leading them down the wrong path. They were letting others think for them.

There is a variety of reasons Jesus' peers refused his help. I would be willing to say you could identify several reasons why those you love have refused your offers, too, and they may be similar to the ones I've just mentioned.

**What do you do when someone will not let you help him or her?** I think this is where the first part of our text speaks to us. When Jesus was told that he should leave Galilee and abandon his entire ministry because of Herod's threat upon his life, how did he respond? Did he give in and leave? Did he walk away from his mission, forgetting about those that needed him?

"Go tell that fox that I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow and the next day **I must be on my way**, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem" Luke 13:31-33.

**"I must be on my way,"** Jesus replied. He wasn't going to give up merely because it was too risky or costly to care. Mother hens never give up! They courageously seek to gather their chicks safely under their wings.

This was why Jesus redoubled his efforts and became even more determined to reach out to those whom he loved. No Herod or host of demons could bar Jesus from his duty. As a matter of fact, Luke tells us that Jesus held out hope even days before he died that people would listen to him and change.

"As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known **on this day** what would bring you peace, but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and your children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you" Luke 19:41-44.

Love and hope would not let him abandon those that needed his help. Reaching out to them was his mission, the call of God upon his life, and he did it until the day he died.

**What about you?** Do you see loving the unlovable and hoping for those that have lost theirs as your mission? Are love and hope strong enough to keep you connected to those that need you even when they are unresponsive?

**Where do you find this kind of sustaining love and energizing hope?** They are the basis of the gospel and the essence of our faith. "Hopelessness is to deny God," someone wrote. With Him all things are possible. This God of hope will give you the wisdom, strength, determination, courage, patience, faith, hope and love you need.

Do you remember the Pendulum Principle? “Every encounter with man must be balanced by an encounter with God.” This is especially true for those that are trying to help family members and friends that will not respond.

Perhaps you need this message of encouragement today. You have grown weary offering help to someone that repeatedly rejects it. Don’t give up. Let love and hope sustain you. **“I must be on my way,”** Jesus said, in the midst of great discouragement. So must we.

Maybe you need to hear this message because someone is trying to reach you. They love you dearly and are worried about your welfare. You are making unwise decisions and headed in the wrong direction. You are going to crash and burn if you don’t change. Is this the morning you need to reconsider what you are doing and respond to those reaching out to you? I hope so and offer to help you make it happen.