

Second Sunday in Lent

JERUSALEM, JERUSALEM!

Luke 13:31-35

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Analysis by Ron Starenko

31At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." 32He said to them, "Go tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33Yet 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.' 34Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who 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! 35See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Note: Luke begins and ends his Gospel in Jerusalem, mentions Jerusalem 90 times, and in this lesson, with the metaphor of the chicks and the mother hen, reminds us that whatever happens there, the bad and the good, we get a view into the danger we face in the world and the safety we are promised.

DIAGNOSIS: Jerusalem Chicks

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : Vulnerable

Jerusalem, the holy city, the nerve center of Jewish politics

and religion, with its reputation for killing the prophets (vv. 33-34), where even Jesus is warned about King Herod's threats (v. 31), becomes the scene of profound pathos. As Jesus views Jerusalem he sees, like a mother hen, how vulnerable are his chicks, how they so easily become fair game, like "little red riding hood" when "the big bad wolf" comes knocking on the door. If prophets aren't safe, the chicks are in bigger trouble, swept away by whomever and whatever would coddle them, only to use them, oppress them, and finally kill them, too. Jesus calls Herod the fox (v. 32), and the prophet John the Baptist called the Pharisees a "brood of vipers" (Luke 3:7)! What chance do the chicks, then and now, have, by themselves, helpless before the power of political administrations, commercial advertising, and even ecclesiastical manipulation?

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Willful*

Vulnerable chicks, however, by their own willfulness, become victims. Instinctively, they want to find out what life is like away from the mother hen out of adventure or even rebellion, not knowing that they will unconsciously follow someone or something else. They will follow foxes into wars; they will follow false prophets into strange religions; they will give up their integrity and even their identity just to be part of the crowd. The Jerusalem chicks, not only oblivious to the dangers around them, also have a need to hang on to their stubborn wills, obstinate to mother hen's call, heedless of the consequences. They may have wandered so far from the shelter of the mother hen's wings that they are lost in the woods with no sense of direction, with no hope of survival (v. 34).

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Scattered*

All of this is a recipe for disaster, as the Jerusalem chicks, defenseless and dumbfounded, are scattered, feathers flying, at last crushed, no match for the teeth of the fox or the talons of the hawk. No longer hearing the voice of mother hen, they fall

prey to the violence of the world, when the chicks no longer have a home, as rebellious Jerusalem comes tumbling down. The chicks also, like all of us, looking around, find that Mother Hen (God) is nowhere to be found. All because we chicks, determined to take life by the horns and do it our own way, as Jesus said, “were not willing” to be gathered (v. 34), our eternal fate is now sealed. Such is the bondage of the will. And Jesus laments it (vv. 34-35).

PROGNOSIS: The Jerusalem Hen

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *The Hen Gathers Her Brood*

Can the doomed chicks be saved? Can a hen, of all things, do the job? A golden eagle maybe, but not a chicken, a barnyard fowl, the lowliest of the winged creatures, what we have for lunch. Someone has said that there is nothing so low that God is not lower still. So, watch the Mother Hen in action. Though her chicks have lost their way and can no longer hear her clucking, she will go looking for them, high and low, vulnerable herself to the ever-present dangers, wings spread, breast exposed, as the fox lurks, waiting to pounce. She will place herself in harms way rather than see her chicks scattered forever. She (that is, our Lord Jesus Christ) will “finish” (v. 32) her work, will give her life, wings spread-eagle on the cross, suffering for their foolishness and rebellion, protecting her chicks from the fury of the fox and from the wrath of the Almighty. This is the new Jerusalem, a vulnerable Mother Hen who dies for the chicks, defeats the enemy, and then returns from death to gather her chicks; the foxes know that they have lost, and the chicks have a life again (cf. the remarkable thirty-fourth chapter of Ezekiel where the metaphor of Shepherd and sheep, scattered and gathered, paints a similar scene.)

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Safe under Her*

Wings

All that accomplished, the new Jerusalem has brought forth her children, now as the Mother of us all (as the prophet Isaiah rejoiced) that we “may nurse and be satisfied from her consoling breast” and “drink deeply with delight from her glorious bosom...carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees” (Isa. 66:11-12). Nourished and nurtured as we are under our Mother’s wings, we rejoice also with the prophet who sings, “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem” (Isa. 66:13). Yes, the chicks are alive again, forsaking the past, letting go of their icons of power and pleasure that cannot save, to turn from their “not willing” (v. 34) to follow Mother Hen and have a house that endures, with a water that cleanses and a feed that fills, as Abraham, having received the promise of salvation and believed (Gen. 15), could look around and count the chicks scampering to find safety under wings of grace and mercy.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Like Hen, Like Chicks*

No mother hen, however, is satisfied merely to have her chicks snuggling under her wings, because this new Jerusalem Mother Hen has other chicks that are not part of her brood that she longs for as well. She knows that it will be necessary for her chicks to leave the safety and comfort of the snuggling, not without her abiding presence to be sure, and enter the fray, against the enemy, to become hens also, vulnerable, laying down their lives for the sake of chicks wandering foolishly, willfully; inviting them, gathering them in love under the wings of the Mother Hen of us all, that the old Jerusalem might not be lost, that at last all the chicks of God will with one voice cry out, “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” (v. 35)!