

As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people both now and forevermore.

(Psalm 125:2)

Luke 13:31-35

Determination is a funny thing. Determination can be seen as two completely different things, depending on the situation. We might view a person's determination as either admirable or insane, depending on the context surrounding that determination. Take for example, the soldier on the battlefield: it is perfectly natural for that soldier to follow orders and be determined to attack the enemy, when the battle plan is clear and the chances for success are good. But we might call somebody crazy who rushes into battle against insurmountable odds. The Confederate soldiers of the American Civil War followed orders and charged the Union soldiers at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. But considering the fact that _____ thousand died in one day in the infamous *Pickett's Charge*, we might call them crazy for doing so. Which type of determination do you see in Jesus? Is he insane for his determination in the face of Herod's threats? After all, Herod had put John the Baptizer to death—cut his head right off and served it on a silver platter. Or is Jesus' determination admirable? Is it something we can look up to? Is it something we value? My fellow believers, his determination goes far beyond admirable. As we'll see today, it's a completely unnatural determination from our perspective. Yet, the eyes of faith know: **Christ is our Resolute Substitute. 1. Focused on his mission, and 2. Filled with compassion.**

1. Focused on his Mission

Have you ever had someone come and give you a real warning? If your mom sat you down at a young age and warned you about hanging out with the wrong crowd (“Bad company corrupts good character,” she used to say), you would be inclined to listen. If your pastor came to you and warned you about the danger sin poses in your life, a real danger eternally, you'd want to hear him out. But have you ever heard a warning from somebody you don't really get along with. If a less than friendly acquaintance at work tells you, “The boss is out to get you!”, you may have to consider their words carefully and not necessarily trust everything they say. That's the kind of ‘warning’ Jesus received from the Pharisees.

Christ had been going through the towns and villages, preaching as he headed to Jerusalem. As he was moving through Herod's territory some Pharisees came to warn him. In all likelihood, these Pharisees had been sent by Herod himself. Whether they were there to intimidate Jesus or to scare him out of town, we can safely assume they weren't interested in Jesus' safety. So, the Lord Christ sent them back to Herod with a message: “Go tell that fox...” Herod may be a sly, cunning person, but he won't fool Jesus. Our Lord won't be tricked, thwarted, or intimidated by anyone—Satan had already tried that and failed. Jesus is not name calling, he's making it clear: **He is our Resolute Substitute.**

“I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.” Jesus' response was filled with determination. He did not even address the danger that Herod was threatening. “In any case, I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day.” Jesus was not giving us a strict chronology for the next three days of his life. Instead, he's describing his mission in life. Jesus was focused on his mission of driving out demons and healing people. *By driving out the demons*, first Jesus dealt with people's spiritual problems. The guilt, the shame, and the burden of sins was taken away. Jesus would continue to undo Satan's entanglement in our lives. That's his focus—and nothing care stop him. *By healing people*, Jesus helped people's physical needs. Jesus is in the miracle business—he's the Physician of our bodies. Today he works through technology and doctors on top of all the other blessings. One day he'll give us NEW bodies without sin's imperfections. That's his mission and Herod cannot stop him.

But Jesus did say, “on the third day I will reach my goal.” He tried so hard to explain to his disciples what his mission was leading him to. Imagine you are one of those twelve disciples, standing beside him and walking with him to Jerusalem. You don’t exactly get what he’s saying. Jesus explained, “The Son of Man must be handed over to the chief priests and teachers of the Law, suffer many things, be killed, and on the third day rise again.” There’s that third day again. Later Jesus explained the sign of his power, the sign of Jonah: three days in the belly of a fish, three days in the earth. There’s power. The disciples heard it again here, “There he goes again talking about the third day. What is he talking about?” It wouldn’t be until after Jesus rose from the dead that the disciples finally got it.

You and I “get it”; we know Jesus spoke figuratively when he said he would reach his goal on the third day. We see the clear reference to his Resurrection on the third day. This is the beautiful truth of our worship today and every day. Christ rose from the dead; no human ruler could stand in his way. The season of Lent is a time of repentance and reflection, without a doubt. But the power of the Resurrection holds sway even today. The message of Christ crucified and risen resounds every Sunday because each Sunday is a “little Easter”. With battlefield determination Jesus confronted his enemy, Herod. He told him nothing would stop him from carrying out his mission. Even though Herod brutally murdered John the Baptizer, Jesus focused on his mission. He did this as our resolute Substitute. He took our place and willingly faced the foe. He did what we couldn’t. He entered the arena of eternity and rescued all people from certain death.

2. Filled with compassion

Christ certainly showed determination worth taking to heart and modeling in our lives. If we lived in a dictatorship, how many of us would have the courage to say, “Hey go tell that fox Castro, I’m not going to stop.” But Jesus was making his way out of Herod’s territory. Soon he would be in Judea, Pilate’s province, and there lay God’s city, Jerusalem. Face to face with that coming reality, our resolute Substitute was **filled with compassion**.

Jerusalem didn’t exactly have the greatest record with prophets. Jeremiah narrowly escaped death at the hands of the Temple officials. It took political advisors and elders to save him, and before long they too would turn aside. Jerusalem means “city of peace” but when messengers came from the God of Peace, Jerusalem killed them. Jesus ironically stated: “Surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem.”

The Savior lamented the reality that was Jerusalem. They stone and kill those sent from God. Jesus’ fate would be no different. Yet listen to his words. There’s a deep truth in the words of Christ. See if you can catch the difference in my reading. I’m going to read Christ’s words twice: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together... but you were not willing!” Or this way: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together... but you were not willing!” Christ, our resolute substitute, faced rejection. And what was his response? Anger? Hostility? Vengeance? Christ was filled with compassion in the face of their rejection. His love was so profound and deep. He didn’t want anyone to perish. He wants all people to trust in him. That is completely unnatural, the opposite of what our nature expects. If someone rejects you, then you reject them.

“How often I have longed to gather your children...” How often had Jesus longed for them? The prophet Isaiah tells us: “All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people” (Romans 10:21). As a father I am waiting for the day when I can hold out my arms, and my little daughter Ruth can run up and hug me. But can you imagine what God does?

All day long he holds out his arms for us. Jesus longs for people to run up to him and give him a hug. How often Jesus longed to gather the people of Jerusalem! He wanted to gather them as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. When a hen senses danger, she draws her chicks together and protects them—this is Christ’s compassion for us and he wants all people to enjoy it. But the sad reality is that they were not willing. The people of Jerusalem rejected Christ.

The same sad reality exists for us today. Many hear the message of Jesus and do not believe it—they reject Jesus and his Word to them. What is our attitude toward them? Does our heart break as it did for Jesus? Sometimes. But sometimes we also have to admit that we forget the love Christ has for us and others. In turn we are not filled with the compassion Christ showed. Consider people who don’t come to church regularly. How do we view such people? Do we long to see them in a closer relationship with Jesus or do we want them back to help our financial budget? Consider people who pursue pleasure in all the ways that are not God-pleasing. Consider the people with problems so bad we don’t even want to mention them by name. Do our hearts break for them? Do we have the compassion Christ showed? Or are we secretly glad that no one with ten tattoos and ten piercings is sitting next to us right now?

Jesus said, “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, find your comfort and compassion in Christ’s compassion. “We love because he first loved us.” Without him we are desolate and empty, spiritually abandoned and without any hope. But by his love him we have more than enough love. He’s covered all our sins, even our moments of rejection and weakness. They are gone, removed eternally from his sight. By the power of the Spirit we see him and we say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.” Now a new heart has been created in me and you. We have the ability to love and show that love for others. What a gracious gift of God! Now live in that love.

But what about the Jews? What’s their fate in all this? Jesus was not slamming the door on Jerusalem when he said, “You won’t see me again...” Even though the temple and the city were destroyed in A.D. 70 by the Romans, God’s gracious invitation will continue to call all people to turn from sin and to see their Resolute Substitute. Then those who trust in Christ will say, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.”

Determination is a funny thing, isn’t it? Christ showed such will-power as he marched to the cross of Calvary. His commitment to our salvation was not craziness or insanity. He was focused on his mission to heal and save. Christ came to give us life. More than that, our resolute Substitute gives us a reason to love. He was filled with compassion, even in the face of rejection. Delay not, O Christian, your Savior calls you to love. AMEN.