

## Living for others

Luke 13.31-end

Rev Dr Jos M. Strengholt

Certain rulers in our world deserve to be treated with contempt.

When Jesus spoke about King Herod Antipas, he used a term of contempt and he called him a fox. This Herod was the son of Herod the Great, who killed the babies in Bethlehem. The son was not a better person. We know him from killing John the Baptist.

### 1. Herod the Fox

In the literature of those days, in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, we see that the fox was seen as crafty and inferior. The fox is an insignificant or base person. He lacks real power and dignity, using cunning and deceit to achieve his aims.

I think in our time, we have a bit more respect for the fox. Had Jesus compared Herod with an animal today, He would probably have called him a rat.

You may not know much of farming, and I certainly am absolutely an ignorant city-boy. But we all know that the biggest enemy of farmers with chicken, are the foxes. Foxes love to sneak into the henhouse and to kill and steal.

King Herod is such a fox, and our Lord Jesus compares himself with the hen.

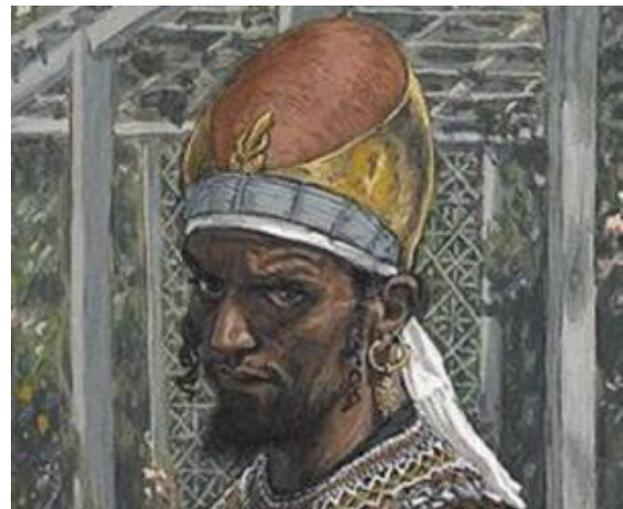
They are arch-enemies. Some people are enemies of the Gospel, enemies of Christ. Not beyond repair maybe, but as they are, they deserve our contempt.

Though we must be careful. God knows all things; He know the hearts of the rulers of our world, and we do not. So in our verdict of anyone, we must be extremely careful. We ourselves are not perfect, and our knowledge of other people is incomplete.

But some rulers deserve the title: fox. Or rat.

This event we have read about occurred in Galilee. Galilee is what is now the northeastern part of Israel. That area was often called Galilee of the nations - because the population was very mixed, Jews and non-Jews together.

And the province was ruled by Herod Antipas.



The Pharisees came to warn Jesus: ‘Herod wants to kill you; you must leave his domain as soon as you can! Danger! Go to Judea, where Herod has no jurisdiction!’

Huh? Some Pharisees who try to save the life of Jesus? That seems to be a new concept. Some were actually quite okay – think of Nicodemus who came to talk with Jesus. But most Pharisees were no friends of Him. Why did they try to get him out of Galilee and into Judea?

Maybe the Pharisees were worried about the impact of the preaching of Jesus in Galilee. He had just held a major preaching campaign, and the interest in his message was great!

Jesus had invited the crowds to believe in Him; he spoke about how to be saved; he had warned the crowds that some Jews would be thrown out of the Kingdom of God, and that non-Jews would be invited into the Kingdom. Jesus warned that for many Jews, eternity was not going to be pleasant.

“There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last.” (Luke 13.28-30)

This was language the Pharisees did not like. They did not like the crowds to be attached to Jesus, and they certainly did not like his comment that some of the first will come last.

They, the Pharisees were the first, according to their own religious calculations. They saw themselves as the special sweethearts of God.

So cunningly they suggested Jesus to leave Galilee. That would diminish his impact on the crowds. And beside that, the power of the Pharisees was much bigger in Judea, as that was the center of their religion. That was where they had their temple; that was where plans to kill Jesus were already being made. Were they luring him to Jerusalem for their own evil plans?



Jesus tells those cunning Pharisees to go to Herod with a message. Is Jesus suggesting they had actually also come from him? Do we have to read the sentence with irony, something like: “You go back to your Herod”?

Jesus gives a message to the Pharisees, to go to Herod and ‘tell that fox’... This is not nice Sunday school language.

To call someone a fox is not kind. And Jesus made it even worse... He actually used the female word for fox, showing utter contempt for Herod. “That evil woman in his palace...”

## 2. Jesus the Hen

The message of Jesus to Herod was:

Go tell that fox, 'I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will finish my work.' (Luke 13.32)

The words 'today, tomorrow and on the third day' were an expression in the Hebrew language; they suggest a target-oriented approach. 'I do this, and that, and then I finish my work.' Jesus underlined that he would reach his goal, and that Herod could not do anything about it.

Jesus says, on the third day I finish my work. In the next verse, He says that his goal is to die in Jerusalem. 'I will finish my work. I will die in Jerusalem.'

When Jesus says, 'I will finish my work,' he uses the same word as when on the Cross He exclaims: 'It is finished. I have reached the goal.'



Jesus did not go to the cross as a victim but as the victor. He chose the time and the place; He made this very clear in his response to Herod. He did not run away from danger – He travelled straight to Jerusalem for adopting the gravest danger thinkable, death on a cross.

Not Herod or any other evil ruler sets the pace in the life of Jesus, but He had it all in his own hands. He had nothing to be afraid of. He is mightier than any worldly ruler.

This is not only encouraging because He was able to save us by his death in Jerusalem. It also encourages me because it shows that God is in charge, and not the rulers of our sad planet.

The political Herods of our world are awful foxes, and their friends the religious Pharisees can be just as bad - but they do not have the last word!

God's plans cannot be stopped. Jesus is more powerful than the palace! Is that not a great encouragement for us all!

So Jesus completed his mission. He reached his goals; He fulfilled God's salvation plans.

In this context Jesus does not speak of himself as the victorious lion; He prefers to speak of himself as a hen. That sounds quite strange... but in the context of his upcoming death in Jerusalem, this was not so strange.

You may have seen pictures of a hen covering its baby chicken under her wings. In a storm, or in rain, or in a fire, hens cover their chicken, lovingly protecting them with their own life.

When the foxes come, they protect their little chicks: They fight and pick and bite... When you approach a mother hen with her chicken, they turn into savage animals! Sometimes hens are able to chase the foxes away, but more often, while defending their offspring, they die in the effort.

### 3. Two options

And here we have the contrast between Herod and Jesus. The political Herods of this world, and many religious leaders with them, walk over people for their own benefit; Jesus however protects people at his own expense. Herod kills; Jesus saves.

So here we have the two options in front of us. Whose party are we with? With Herod? Do we live to serve our own goals? If someone has hurt us, do we take revenge? Are we the people of power who will never allow anyone to walk over us?

Do we misuse our power and position for pushing others down so that we go up?

Or are we on the side of Jesus, whose life was marked by living for others, even if that was painful for himself?

The shocking thing is that Jesus places the people of God, in Jerusalem, on the side of Herod. Herod is a killer, but Jerusalem is also a killer. It has chosen the side of power.

The rulers of Israel have so often focused on their own might and wealth only. So when prophets came, who told them to walk in the ways of love, the ways of righteousness, the ways of Jesus, they were killed.

God send so many prophets to his own people, but many were killed. And now, finally, God has sent his Son to Jerusalem, hoping that his people would now, finally, listen to him. And the Son says:

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, and you were not willing. (Luke 13.34)

Here we see the mother heart, the father heart of God. Even though the people again and again rejected the word of God, Jesus had always wanted to gather the people in His arms.

Jesus wanted to protect the city from its own sins, and from the punishment of God that was coming. But the city chose to behave just as the evil Herod did: it wanted to kill Jesus. Even God's final offer, even God himself visiting the city did not make a difference for them.



Some people are so impressed by the love of God that they find it hard to believe that God can also punish, eternally punish. But Jesus himself makes clear that God's love does not eradicate His justice.

People who not willingly hide under the love of God, under the wings of his Son, have to face the show of his justice. And from his justice, no one can escape.

To Jerusalem Jesus said: "your house is left to you desolate; you were not willing."

The house of Israel, Jerusalem and its temple, were abandoned by God's presence and blessings. And God's evacuation of the city soon led to its destruction. In the year 70 these words were fulfilled, when Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed.

God did not destroy Jerusalem. He just withdrew his presence. When God is no longer present, all things collapse.

This is hell - a state of total Godlessness. The absence of God is the worst thing imaginable. The one who created love, joy and peace, if He is not around, our love, joy and peace will soon completely disappear.

## **Conclusion**

So like Jerusalem so many years ago, we stand before the choice. Is Herod our model for life? Using the elbows, walking over people, playing power games? Using people to reach our own goals?

Or is Jesus our model? The one who lived for God, who existed for others, and who was eventually welcomed back into the throne of God?

Nothing is safer than fully choosing the side of our Lord Jesus and living under his protection. And that safety also gives us the power, to take a clear stand for people and against the powers that oppress them.

It makes us people who do not fear whosoever lives in the palace.

Jesus invites us to follow him. That begins by the decision to live under his protective wings; He protects from sin, from punishment, from demons; He protect from curses, from fear of people, even from fear of bad rulers.

He protects us from anything that may hurt our soul and our eternal destiny because He gathers us in his arms as a hen gathers her chicken under her wings.

## **Amen**