

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“Just give up.” A mindset that has led to some tragic events in our lifetimes. The examples out there are numerous, and I’m sure there’s at least a few that hit home for you. Basically there was a person, dealing with so many struggles and just couldn’t handle it anymore. Maybe a high school student, grades dropping, parents getting on their case, and the final straw, being bullied, being rejected at school, and wanted it to stop. So they gave up. They shot themselves or overdosed on sleeping pills or something of the like. Such a tragedy whenever you hear about something like that happening.

Rejection is something all too real in our lives. All of us here have probably in one way or another felt the effects of it...and it hurts. And you wish it would all go away. But in our spiritual lives, it won’t. If we are going to walk the road to the cross, it’s going to involve rejection.

We face it, but we’re not alone. Jesus knows it, too. Now, I’m not just talking about the bullying he experienced during his earthly life. Like early on in Nazareth, his hometown, when Jesus read the Scriptures, the Old Testament prophecies concerning him, and he said as much to the people in the synagogue, they didn’t like it, so they dragged him outside the city to throw him off the cliff, thankfully, unsuccessfully so.

Or from the Pharisees, too many times to count. Talking down to Jesus, scrutinizing his every word, his every action, trying to entrap him every chance they got because they couldn’t believe he was who he said he was, the Son of God.

But now here in our verses, Jesus alludes to another kind of rejection. Here he was, preaching in the villages outside of Jerusalem, very much in King Herod’s jurisdiction, and some Pharisees came to him with a warning. “Get out of here while you still can because if Herod catches wind of you being here, he will come after you. He wants you dead.

Why these Pharisees, usually the enemy, came to Jesus and warned him? You know, I want to give them the benefit of the doubt and believe that they were concerned about Jesus’ well-being and didn’t want him to face the same end as John the Baptist, who was beheaded by the same King Herod.

But more likely, there was some evil intent with their warning, that the Pharisees were trying to coerce Jesus to go to Jerusalem where they were setting up a trap to grab him, arrest him, and kill him.

Whatever their real intent was, Jesus wouldn’t be swayed. He wouldn’t give up. Calling Herod a fox, a sly and crafty creature, Jesus basically said, “I’m not going anywhere. I have the Lord’s work to do, and I’m going to keep doing it until the time is right.”

It wasn’t that Jesus was scared of going to Jerusalem. He knew what would happen in Jerusalem. There he would face ultimate rejection, death. But he wouldn’t be the first. Other prophets, especially in the Old Testament, had gone before him and had suffered his same fate, death, in Jerusalem as well. But before that could happen, Jesus acknowledged he had more of his Father’s work to attend to, healing, preaching, driving out demons.

And then comes Jesus' sorrowful lament, "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 unwilling!"

Can you see what was causing Jesus so much grief and pain? Jerusalem, the "city of peace," as its name means in the original language, killed the very people sent by God to preach peace. Jesus would be one of those casualties.

Jesus urgently desired Jerusalem's salvation. He compared himself to a mother hen to show just how much he longed for that. A mother hen who will do whatever takes to protect her brood from the attacks of the hungry hawk by calling out to her fledglings to come and find shelter, refuge under her own wings.

So this nation, Jerusalem belonged to Jesus. He desperately wanted these people to be his very own, to be God's faithful children. But the sad reality was they didn't. They weren't willing. They didn't want Jesus. No more tragic words than these. The people of Jerusalem rejected him, the One who came to save them.

Can you see the seriousness of Jesus' claim here? People were rejecting him. People were rejecting Jesus, God. Jesus was talking about unbelievers, those who did not want God in their lives and who were shutting him out.

Friends, Jesus here is issuing a severe warning, not just to the Pharisees, not just to the people of Jerusalem, but to you and me as well.

We know he wants all people for himself, to be with him in heaven. The Bible says, "God our Savior wants all men (really all people) to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." The Bible says, "He [the Lord] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

And yet, in the same breath, God warns us about the very real danger of falling away, of rejecting Jesus. "If you think you are standing firm," God warns, "be careful that you don't fall." "Be alert," God warns, "Your enemy the devil, prowls around like a lion, looking for someone to devour."

Jesus knows there are people who are giving up, who are falling away, who are rejecting him, and he doesn't want us to follow them, to be like Jerusalem here. He doesn't want us to get caught up with those people who live to satisfy their own desires to the neglect of what God desires for godly living, like those who make selfish decisions, thinking only about themselves, not regarding how it affects anyone else, or even if it goes against God's commands or not.

Jesus doesn't want us to get caught up with the prevailing attitudes today, where God is important only when it's convenient for me; only when I have a need will I go to him. Because pretty soon God becomes an afterthought rather than the most important person in life.

Jesus doesn't want us to get caught up in the sins of the world, where society sets the standards, where it deems certain lifestyles and actions as ok, even though God clearly calls them sin. Oh, it's easy to fall

in line. I've seen it happen in close friends who were as strong in their convictions and their belief and their faith as I am. But when the devil bombarded them with temptations as succulent as that piece of forbidden fruit Eve sunk her teeth into, they could stand no longer. They gave up on Christ, and rejected him and lost faith in him.

And as much as it pains Jesus to lose them, it pains him even more to speak these words of judgment to those who are not willing, who reject him, "Look, your house is left to you desolate." Or, as he says in the book of Galatians, "The acts of the sinful nature are obvious...I warn you...that those who live like this (or more literally, those who are continually living like this, with no turning back) will not inherit the kingdom of God."

Jesus warns of a desolate house, an empty house, empty of God. A life without God, you know where that leads. And losing out on the inheritance of the kingdom of God, that results in the same destination.

Can you imagine what it would be like if Jesus was the one who had given up on us? If Jesus had been the one who rejected us instead of the other way around? It would be hell for every single one of us, and we would be nothing but deserving of it. The blame for eternal condemnation would be ours and ours alone.

But look at what Jesus says here when the Pharisees were encouraging him to give up and to get out of harm's way while he still could. "I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day," and before that, "on the third day I will reach my goal." That sounds like a man on a mission, determined to carry out his work, no matter what obstacles, what dangers, what rejections would stand in his way.

And there were plenty of them. Isaiah foretold what would happen, "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

From you and me, every time we sin, it's a rejection of Jesus. Not a complete rejection, a loss of faith, but turning our backs on him and what he wants from us.

And none of it stopped him. Jesus did not give up. When the temptations to give up and go just back to heaven and let mankind suffer God's wrath surrounded Jesus on every side, he said no. He rejected those attempts. He remained perfect as he walked the road to the cross.

When his work reached its climax, his crucifixion at Calvary, carrying the consequences and punishment for every sin so we could have his righteousness, Jesus boldly went and died for us.

And when the time of his celebration over the devil and his minions at Satan's house was finished, after three days, Jesus rose, the seal on his decisive victory in the war with sin. That's the third day Jesus is talking about in these verses when he says, "On the third day I will reach his goal." That was the goal of salvation, paying for the sins of the whole world. Those who were his own, for us, he paid for our sins and our rejections, and for our giving up on him.

But Jesus has never given up on us. His life, death, and resurrection show that. They prove just how far Jesus and his love was willing to go for us, to save us. All that, in the face of rejection. All that, so he can encourage us, because you know what. Jesus wasn't the only facing rejection on his walk to the cross. As we walk with him, not just to the cross, but in our entire lives, we face rejection, too.

From those who don't want Christ in their lives, but are being used by Satan to attack those who are Christ's own. You know how sneaky and how subtle, but how hurtful those attacks, those snide remarks, those course jokes can be.

But Jesus tells us, "He who rejects you rejects me..." They're really speaking out against God. Jesus also encourages us, "Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crowns of life." He calls for us to reject...to reject the sins of the world and those attacks of Satan, and instead to live for him. And Jesus works through us to remain faithful to him, even while the rejections and sin's blows abound.

Don't give up. You know, that goes against the grain of our sinful nature, to persevere when the going gets tough. We've seen how intense the suffering and rejections were that Jesus faced on his walk to the cross.

We would be naïve to think our walk with him to the cross would involve the same. But we walk on, and here's our mantra as we do: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." Because on that day when Jesus comes, our walk will be complete. The rejections, the attacks, they will be done. And we will receive the crown of life, eternal life, forever. Amen.