

Sermon March 17 2019, Lk 13v31-35 and Phil 3v17-4v1

Tested by reputation... where would you put these people on the washing line of reputation?

... Stephen Hawking? Usain Bolt? Harold Shipman? Meghan, Duchess of Sussex? Mariah Carey? Justin Welby? You?

Actually, it does not matter where you put yourself –] whether you think others admire you or detest you. What matters is what God thinks.

Jesus set that example for us. Some of the Pharisees came whispering, ‘Herod wants to kill you! Flee!’ Jesus knew that what mattered was what God thought, and he knew that God had different plans for him. But I wonder if this was another temptation for Jesus. ‘Don’t trust God. Keep quiet, move to a different area, don’t annoy Herod and you can stay alive!’ Jesus knew that God was good and could be trusted.

Jesus also loved the people around him. Listen as he speaks to the people of Jerusalem, ‘you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you. How often have I desired to gather your children together, as a hen gather her brood under her wings. But you were not willing’

Let’s focus on that verse bit by bit:

Some years ago, when Debbie first moved to Birmingham, she wondered where to live. She looked at one area, but as she got out of the car, some teenage boys threw stones at her. She did not stay. Most of us do not stay where we are not wanted. The surprising thing is that God does!

Imagine that Jesus walked in through that door, and we responded by throwing things at him and pushing him out, then we bolted and barred the door so he could not get in. Sorry Jesus, don’t interrupt our service...

Jesus would still love us just as much. Whatever we’ve done; whatever we think of ourselves. We can push him out, close the door on him, turn our backs, but we cannot make God love us less. As far as God is concerned, we are, each of us, on the smiley end of that washing line. For some of us, that can be hard to believe.

Whether we believe it or not, let’s look at the next bit: How often have I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gather her brood under her wings.

I don't know hens very well, but I've seen plenty of geese in the various parks around Birmingham. Both hens and geese are rather stupid creatures, but a hen or a goose with chicks under her wings will fight danger fiercely. I've been attacked by a goose that thought I was too close! Imagine those geese in the park next door. The goslings can wander and feed but if danger comes – a dog or fox – the goslings rush to hide under the mother's wings. They are warm, they are protected. They are not alone. But some goslings don't run to the mother when danger appears. They freeze or try to run away. Those may not survive. The mother is the safe place, but only if the goslings go to her.

God is the safe place, but only if we go to him.

Sometimes, there are areas of our lives where we are not willing to go to God. We wonder if God really is good – the shootings in New Zealand might make us ask that question. We wonder how God can really care for me. We wonder what God might ask us to do. Maybe he will suggest we change! Maybe he will tell us not to worry about our reputation! Or maybe God wants to talk to me about that time in my life when I was hurt. Maybe I will just stay away from God for this bit. We all have areas like that – or maybe it is just me. The glorious thing is that God does not love us any less if we don't go to him.

We can throw stones at God, or shout at him, or even try to kill his presence in our lives, but he longs to gather us together and show his love. The Creator of the Universe loves us, but it also depends on us. God respects our choices too.

So we know what God thinks of us: he loves us and respects us. The question is, are we willing to trust him in all areas of our lives? If not, do we want to be willing? Do we want to want to be willing?

Set some homework...

As you pray this week, or sandpaper your cross, talk to God. Ask God if there are areas where you are not willing for him to come into? It might be an area of anger, or pain, or fear. It might be believing that God really does love us. Talk to God. See what God says.

Amen.