

## Living as if Heaven Rules

Luke 13:31-35

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Stephen Davey

History books are filled with stories of people the world deems important. Whether they are famous, or infamous, part of society involves determining the important players in the history of the world and documenting their achievements. But in Jesus' earthly ministry, He didn't associate Himself with the powerful—the high rollers of history—but with the lowly. And that's because Jesus knew that the kings on earth had no more power than that which God allowed them. And with that perspective, we see human history—and its influential figures—in a more godly light.

More than likely, you've never heard of these powerful men in their own respective worlds, serving at the height of their career, impacting their world and beyond, some 75 or so years ago.

Just in case, here's a pop quiz: what do you know about Hugh Johnson, Haile Selassie, and Harlow Curtis?

Hugh Johnson crafted the New Deal in 1933 under President Roosevelt; he was credited with brilliantly reorganizing and putting American business back on its feet following the Great Depression

Haile Selassie was the Emperor of Ethiopia who traced his lineage back to King Solomon; he reigned until 1974, considered the defining figure in modernizing Ethiopia.

And what about Harlow Curtis? He was the President of General Motors when, in 1955, they earned \$1 billion of revenue in a single year.

Although these three men were from different generations, and even different countries of birth, they had one thing in common: they were Time Magazine's Man of the Year, and their faces adorned the cover of Time Magazine.

The fact that you probably don't know who they are—or even how their lives might have impacted yours today—proves that history comes equipped with an eraser.

Even recent history tends to erase the legacies of people who were once called the movers and shakers of the world.

It's a good reminder that significance on earth doesn't last.

As my mother used to teach us growing up: *Only one life, twill soon be past—only what's done for Christ will last.*

History all too quickly pulls out the eraser on what seems to be unforgettable.

But history also provides insight and a clearer perspective.

If you look through the list of inductees into this hall of fame, some of them, who were thought to be something special or dynamic, were proved otherwise through the lens of history.

For instance, Time Magazine's Man of the Year in 1923 was Benito Mussolini, the brutal, fascist dictator and personal ally and friend of Adolph Hitler. Mussolini styled himself as Napoleon and murdered anyone in his way.

I was curious, so I read Time Magazine's cover story for Mussolini, printed in 1923—what embarrassing praise! It reads in part: "Mussolini exhibits remarkable self-control, rare judgment and an efficient application of his ideas."

Yeah, he killed you if you got in his way—that is somewhat efficient.

Eventually, decades after his bloody reign, his own countrymen finally put him on trial and then put him to death.

If you were living 2000 years ago, one individual would have been considered the defining figure in the Middle East; he would have won—hands down—man of the year, and probably more than once.

He was a member of one of the most famous family dynasties in this region, a half-dozen kings were from this same family. He was appointed king over the region of Galilee by the Roman Emperor himself. He will be mentioned by name more times in the New Testament than any other ruler.

His official name was King Herod Antipas, he was the son of Herod the Great.

You may remember King Herod the Great was the king who tried to trick the Magi and then later ordered the slaughter of little boys in the region of Bethlehem

When he died, one of his sons, Herod Antipas, began ruling in Galilee.

He was equally brutal and immoral. He seduced his wife into leaving her husband—who happened to be his own brother.

He was a coward and a killer; his wife had been enraged when John the Baptist publicly stated that their marriage was sinful. Later, Herod will comply with her desire to have John the Baptist killed, his head literally delivered to her on a platter (Mathew 14:10).

It will be in front of this King Herod that Jesus will eventually stand trial.

Let me tell you, from all the external evidence, Herod was the man in control; he was the power player; he was the one who determined destinies and legacies.

But in hindsight, history will show us the tragic and humiliating death of Herod and the glorious power of the gospel.

So, Herod wasn't in power; Heaven was.

And we need to remember that today. Simply put: Heaven rules. And we need to live as if it does—because it does.

Herod's throne was temporary; God's throne is eternal.

We need to think, and live and respond to our world with this overriding understanding that Heaven rules—the Creator of heaven and earth is in total control.

Now for the first time, the Gospel of Luke connects the ministry of Jesus with the rule of King Herod Antipas. And the exchange produces some fireworks.

We've been listening in as Jesus invites his audience to enter the family of God through the narrow gate, and the gate is narrow—not so much in size, but in singularity.

Jesus will later say, ***“I am the way, the truth and the life—no one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:5).***

He even makes the statement that He himself is the door. He said to His audience in ***John 10:9: “I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved.”***

Now following that invitation, Jesus is interrupted, ***Luke 13:31 tells us:***

*At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.”*

*Luke 13:31*

This is an alarming message: Herod Antipas wants Jesus dead.

We're informed in Matthew's Gospel that Herod is tortured by guilt from ordering the death of John the Baptist and he's terrified that Jesus is John the Baptist resurrected from the dead (Matthew 14:2).

So, he evidently plans to do what he does best: kill his opponents.

Now if I can break down this passage into several principles that we can live by today as we recognize the sovereignty of God and the rule of Heaven, here's the first principle I want to point out:

### **Serving the Lord faithfully will not eliminate enemies or critics.**

Imagine the irony of this. Verse 31 again:

*"Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."*

*Luke 13:31b*

What's Jesus been doing? Preaching, healing, delivering people, forgiving sin, correcting false religion.

If anybody deserved to have nothing but a long line of friends, it would be Jesus.

In fact, if any ruler on the planet had any sense, just the healing ministry of Jesus alone should've granted Him access into the highest courts and palaces of the land.

And yet the only time Jesus will arrive in a palace is after His arrest.

Ransack the Scriptures and you will find one account after another delivering this principle that opportunity is always met by opposition.

You begin to openly profess Jesus Christ and watch; enemies will line up faster than friends.

The Bible says, ***"All you desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12).***

Rather than the church complaining that we don't have enough friends in society, maybe we should be complaining that we don't have enough enemies.

Serving God faithfully will not eliminate enemies and critics; it will multiply them.

And by the way, these Pharisees here aren't telling Jesus this news because they care about Him, or because they want Him to stay alive; they're already trying to figure out how to kill Him.

Are they telling Jesus this now because they want to drive Him out of Galilee and back into Jerusalem where he'll come under the authority of the Jewish High Court—the Sanhedrin—so they can arrest Him?

David E. Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 559

Herod doesn't control Jerusalem, Pilate does, and Pilate's in the back pocket of the High Priest.

Or maybe these Pharisees just want Jesus to leave their town.

Are maybe they're hoping He'll hear this news and make a run for it, which would discredit His claim to be in control of His destiny as the Son of God; He makes the claim in **John 18:18**, ***“No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”***

So, if Jesus runs for the hills, it'll prove that He isn't in control after all.

We're not given the Pharisee's motive, but we do know that Herod has already killed John the Baptist, and he now wants to kill Jesus.

So, get this: the faithful ministry, the godly life of Jesus has just made one more very powerful enemy. Maybe you have as well? Maybe you made an enemy for doing the right thing.

Here's the second principle of how we should live, considering the fact, that Heaven rules:

**Opposition should not reroute our mission nor rewrite our message.**

Notice again here in **verse 31**:

*Some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.’”*

*Luke 13:31b-32*

“Go tell that fox.” I like that, don't you? One author writes that the Lord is using a little holy sarcasm here.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13* (Victor Books, 1988), p. 155

In the Lord's Day, a fox was someone who was crafty, someone who was considered an insignificant person who was making a nuisance of themselves.

Adapted from Garland, p. 559

It's as if the Lord is saying, "You might be King Herod, but you're no comparison to the King of Heaven."

You might think you're something, but history has an eraser, and it will erase who you think you are and then reveal for all of eternity who you really are.

"Go tell that fox that I'm not slowing down."

Hugh Latimer, who would be martyred later in life by Queen Mary in 1555, was once preaching in Westminster Abbey when King Edward VI stepped into the audience. In the pulpit, as Latimer continued preaching, he said, "Latimer, Latimer, be careful what you say, the king of England is here." Then he went preach, "Latimer, Latimer, be careful what you say, the King of Kings is here."

William Barclay, [The Gospel of Luke](#) (Westminster, 1975), p. 186

That's the perspective here: Jesus isn't just putting on a brave face, He's demonstrating absolute confidence in His Father; He understands that death is predetermined by God and until that time arrives, Herod can't do anything about it.

Adapted from J. Dwight Pentecost, [The Words and Works of Jesus Christ](#) (Zondervan, 1981), p. 328

*So go back and tell Herod, "I know you're a cunning man, you're crafty, but you're no match for My mission and My message."*

Did you notice that Jesus says here that He will keep on **casting out demons and curing people**? In other words, His message of forgiveness and deliverance won't change; and He's going to stay on track—notice—**until "the third day [when] I finish my course."**

This is an allusion to His glorious resurrection that cannot be stopped by all the power of hell.

Jesus is demonstrating what happens when you live as if you believe that Heaven rules—that God is sovereign.

He's effectively quoting the perspective of **Psalm 31:15, "My times are in your hands."**

Sometimes it seems like life unfolds by accident, by someone else's decision, someone else's power over you, by chance, or luck, or fate.

Bruce B. Barton, [Life Application Bible: Luke](#) (Tyndale Publishing, 1997), p., 350

No, life unfolds by God's design, under God's supervision; even sin and evil cannot derail God's ultimate plan throughout history.

There are times when we'll never know what God's up to; but there are those times when after a little time, we see what God had mind.

*Oh, I thought that person was in control; I thought that series of events was shaping everything; I thought that accident didn't have any rhyme or reason—it was just chaos and trouble.*

But later, you realize that God was behind the scenes all along.

Like Joseph, who said as an older, wiser man to his brothers when they showed up in Egypt. “You meant it for evil—and let me tell you—it really was evil. And it really messed up my life; it caused me plenty of tears and loneliness and fear and confusion. I couldn't believe Potiphar listened to his wife; and I thought I'd never get out of that prison. I was forgotten and I thought that was it!” (paraphrase).

“But now, looking back over time, brothers, it's clear, isn't it? You meant it for evil, but God superintended—God overruled—what you did. You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.” And with that perspective, Joseph can do the unthinkable: he can forgive his brothers.

When you know that Heaven rules, your circumstances and even your enemies can be viewed differently.

That's the third principle I want to draw from this passage:

**Antagonism and hatred should not eliminate a spirit of compassion.**

Verse 33:

*“Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.’  
O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”*

*Luke 13:33-34*

Underscore that last phrase: “you were not willing.” Listen, at the heart of unbelief is an unwilling heart.

**“Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem.”** This is a sob of anguish, by the way, not an expression of anger. One author wrote, “His compassionate heart is broken.”

Wiersbe, p. 155

But get this here: even though He's just expressed trust and faith in the power of God the Father; even though He tells Herod, “You crafty little fox, you're not going to stop me for a moment”; even though He already knows Jerusalem will reject Him; even though He knows He will be crucified by the nation, He starts weeping over them.

Why?

Because he is both God—who knows the future—and He is man—who feels the present, just like you would feel it here.

Nothing hurts so much as to offer love to someone and have that offer rejected. William Barclay writes on this text. “It is life's bitterest tragedy to give your heart to someone only to have it broken.” And that is what's happening in the heart of Jesus, as he faces Jerusalem. He invites mankind, but mankind rejects Him.

Barclay, p. 186

There are no more tragic words in history than these: “***I would have gathered you under my wings, but you refused.***”

Because of their defiance, Jesus predicts their devastation, **verse 35:**

*“Behold, your house is forsaken.”*

*Luke 13:35a*

Jerusalem will be destroyed; the **house** left desolate. The house of Israel—the temple—will be destroyed. Both the nation and the temple will be desolate; the people will be scattered.

Wiersbe, p. 156

And to this day, beloved, the nation Israel fights for every square inch of land that it does not yet occupy but will one day in the coming Kingdom of Messiah.

But in the meantime, there is no king in Israel; there is no High Priest; there is no temple or sacrificial system.

Ibid

This is the devastation predicted here by the Lord.

But then the Lord gives this wonderful prediction of a future day—**verse 35 again:**

*“And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”*

*Luke 13:35b*

This is a reference to the return of Christ, following the regathering of Israel during the Tribulation period.

A day will come when God keeps His promise to Israel and they will literally inhabit the promised land, as Christ comes to reign upon the earth in the Millennial Kingdom

The apostle Paul writes that God has not abandoned Israel, and in that day, ***all Israel shall be saved (Romans 11:25-26).***

But in the meantime, most of this generation here is going to reject the Lord. Jesus will say in ***John 5:40: "You refuse to come unto Me, that you might have life."***

I think of Joseph Stalin, who was named Time Magazine's man of the Year in 1942.

Hailed as a hero for helping stop the global threat of Adolph Hitler, this Russian premier would become one of the most powerful men on the planet. As a young man he attended seminary, planning to enter the ministry; but he lived an immoral life and eventually left seminary, declaring himself an atheist.

When he rose to power, he did everything he could to crush Christianity and the gospel. As he led the Soviet Union, he had millions of people at his mercy; and he showed them none. Millions were executed or starved to death to bring them under his control.

Stalin means steel, and Joseph Stalin loved to portray himself as the image of being a steel-like man.

Stalin had seven bedrooms. He would spend each night of the week in a different bedroom for fear of being assassinated. He employed a household servant to do nothing more than monitor his teabags.

His daughter Svetlana would defect to the US after her father's death. I have read most of her biography and on one occasion, she visited Malcolm Muggeridge, the brilliant journalist and committed Christian. Svetlana talked of her father's death. She wanted to know if Muggeridge could explain why her father had done something very strange on his deathbed.

She said that just before he died, he suddenly sat up in his bed, clenched his fists and raised them defiantly toward the ceiling, then fell back on his pillow and died. Muggeridge explained her father's hatred of God and His Word.

It was one last invitation, and one last refusal.

What about you today? Where do you stand today? Are you standing against Him? Would Jesus be weeping over you? He's willing to save you today; will you still refuse to believe?

Are you standing against Him? Or are you standing with Him?

Let me take it a step further: are you standing for Him?

Frankly, I think the only way a believer can truly stand for Him—with confidence and balance and hope—is to know that Heaven rules. Our times are in his hands. With that, let me give you two final thoughts. Two principles of application from the scene here.

**The power of nations or political leaders can never derail the purposes of God.**

God is in control—even of them. His plans are on track, on course, and on time.

**The defiance of unbelievers has not yet eliminated an invitation from God.**

What about you? What are you going to do about the invitation from God to you, today?

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