

"The Stones of Denial"—Luke 13:34

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, "The Stones of Denial", is Luke 13:34 → These are the words of Jesus: *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!* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Have you ever heard your own voice from a recording? Have you ever seen yourself in a video? How did you react when you encountered yourself in these ways? Many people dislike hearing their own voice and seeing themselves on video, thinking they sound and look awful or stupid. Ever know anyone who "hated" to have their picture taken or did not want to take part in a recorded interview? No matter how encouraging you may be in **your perception** of their voice or behavior they refuse to believe you!

Denial: The refusal to believe and/or acknowledge a truth which has been revealed. People live in denial all the time. It can reveal itself in statements like: "I do not act like my father!" or "Who died and made you God?" It can

reveal itself in behavior which is very defensive, self-destructive and aggressive. Face it, no one likes their thoughts, words and deeds to be criticized, contradicted or condemned by **anyone**, including God! This is especially true when living in the denial of personal sin to which our sinful human natures cling so strongly!

Our text speaks about the stones of denial. The stones of denial are all too evident in our lives of self-righteousness. In an effort to defend our own “righteousness,” right or wrong, we will refuse to accept the truth or reinterpret it to support our position. Jesus encountered this same attitude throughout His earthly ministry displayed by the many times people picked up stones of denial to throw at Him.

Our text records Jesus contemplating Jerusalem’s place in the history of God’s redemptive work. He was grieved over the people’s denial as they encountered the LORD’s will for their lives. 2 Chronicles 36:15-16 describes their denial: *The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place. But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising His words and scoffing at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against His people, until there was no remedy.* Jerusalem had a history of denial and gained the reputation as *the city that kills the prophets and stones those who*

are sent to it. Even Jesus' lament in our text flowed from His desire for their redemption, not to simply point out their denial. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem* is an address of tender affection, a heart longing for the welfare of a loved one!

Denial—refusal to accept the reality of something—is very dangerous when it comes to your relationship with the LORD. It produces an unwillingness to experience grace, love and compassion because of hard-heartedness. Jesus expressed it with a picture in our text: *How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and **you were not willing!*** If a person is not experiencing the benefits of God's love, forgiveness, grace and peace it's that person's fault, not God's fault. He is unwilling to face up to his spiritual denial and receive forgiveness through repentance and faith in Christ.

Another way in which denial reflects itself is in self-righteous judgment. As long as a person is striving to accentuate the unacceptable or sinful behavior of someone else he can avoid the vulnerability which may expose his own sin. It is focused on how the other person is meeting up to God's standards and strives to make sure they know it. It's kind of like listening to a sermon, elbowing the person next to you and saying, "See? I told you so!" Or hearing points in the sermon and immediately thinking of various people who "fit the bill" without even a thought that I "fit the bill" too. It's like throwing the stones

of condemnation at others in an effort to deny one's own sin.

Jesus described this type of judgment in Matthew 7:1-5, one of the most misapplied passages of the Bible by Christians and non-Christians alike. Jesus said: *Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.* As long as I am focused on everyone else's behavior it will keep me from seeing my need for faith in the only One Who has dealt with my sin once and for all—Jesus. Denial is one of satan's most effective tools for sabotaging faith in Christ.

Even in the face of the stony hearts of denial Jesus was still perseverant in accomplishing God's redemptive work with an undying love for such hard-hearted sinners . . . or shall I say a dying love for them! The context in which this lament over Jerusalem takes place reveals the complete submission of Jesus to His Father's will with complete love for sinners in denial!

In the context some Pharisees warned Jesus that Herod wanted to kill Him. Jesus told them that He must finish His course leading to Jerusalem and

death, *for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.*

Jesus knew His death was inevitable in Jerusalem. Could the deaths of prophets and messengers throughout their history have been a glimpse of the redemption yet to come in Christ Who would also need to die in Jerusalem?

Even in the anguish of being amidst sinners and dying at their hands, submission to His Father's plan and will was priority! Do not think this trek was easy for Jesus according to His human nature. Hebrews 5:7-9 says: *In the days of His flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to Him Who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His reverence. Although He was a son, He learned obedience through what He suffered. And being made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.* The cross was inevitable **and** necessary for you and I!

However, the cross is both Law and Gospel for us. Viewing the Lord of Life on the cross is Law in that it will bring you face to face with your sin. It is possible to still live in denial of your sin even though you are made aware of it in the suffering and death of Jesus. However, it is supposed to act like a mirror in this way in order to move you from denial in hard-heartedness to repentance. We see this reflected in the thieves crucified with Jesus. One continued in denial of his sin and clung in smug self-righteousness to His

mockery. The other let go of his denial and pleaded for grace. We see this in the response of the centurion at the foot of the cross. *When the centurion, who stood facing Jesus, saw that in this way He breathed His last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"* (cf. Mark 15:39) Whether or not this centurion realized the significance of his statement the Holy Spirit brought him from denial in sin to confession in faith!

Viewing the Lord of Life on the cross is Gospel in that it reveals the steadfast love of God for you, the forgiveness of your sins and eternal life with Christ! The Holy Spirit is calling you to let go of your denial in sin because Jesus has dealt with its condemnation once and for all! It is He Who turns the "stony" heart of denial into the "soft" heart of repentance, compassion, peace and humility! It is only such a heart which can pray in submission, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It is such a heart which strives to obey Christ in humble service to others, making a right judgment by viewing others **in Christ!** Amen.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—

though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—

but God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners,

Christ died for us. (Romans 5:6-8)