

Be Willing

✠ in God's time (vv.31-33)

✠ for the Lord's mercy (vv.34-35)

In the name of Jesus who reveals for us the pleading heart of God, my fellow forgiven sinners:

“A Man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.” I’m not so sure most Christians understand the truth of Ben Franklin’s words. Sometimes they suggest that if only God would do miracles as with Moses and the Israelites in the desert, then people would come around. But did you read the story of Achan in this week’s *Meditations*? That man saw forty years of miracles in the desert. Achan watched God part the waters of the flooded Jordan River for Joshua and the entire nation of Israel to cross over on dry ground. Achan marched with the army around Jericho seven days until the walls collapsed by God’s almighty power. So why did he covet, then steal some of the plunder when it was all devoted to the LORD? Why was Achan not afraid of God’s judgment on himself and his family? He left his name to the Valley of Achor with a large pile of rocks where they buried him. (Joshua 7) No one wins the battle of the wills against God. But God is too kind to force His will on people. Today He pleads: **Be Willing**.

✠ in God's time (vv.31-33)

As citizens in a free country, it’s hard to imagine what life was like for the Jews in Jesus’ day. One oppressive foreign power followed another for 700 years. Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks with Alexander the Great, Seleucids – tyrants ruled as God’s people waited for the promised Messiah to come and deliver them. One ruler asked the Romans for help, and the Roman army never left until the empire fell. After Caesar Augustus declared himself a god, Roman emperors felt all the more justified in their iron fisted tactics. Sure they let local kings like Herod “Antipas” control the populace. But this son of Herod the Great imprisoned Jesus’ cousin John the Baptist, then beheaded him to fulfill a drunken oath. In spite of miracles King Herod refused to yield his will to God in humble repentance. Finally, Herod “Antipas” was banished and died. **“Repent or perish”** (13:1-5), Jesus said, **in God’s time**.

We’re not sure why some Pharisees sent a warning message to Jesus to escape from Herod’s territory. Maybe leaving Galilee or Perea on the other side of the Jordan would take Jesus right to Jerusalem where they could finally carry out their plans to kill Him. After so many scathing sermons from Jesus against their self-righteousness, there certainly was no love lost between the Pharisees and this itinerant Rabbi from Nazareth. They acted very much like Americans today when anyone dares point out the sins by which we offend God and hurt our neighbor. They refused to accept that God’s will is pure justice that will punish every sin. On our own that debt can only be paid in the eternal fires of hell.

We could spend our time talking about what’s wrong with society and miss the message of God’s pleading love for us today. This is **God’s time** to plead: **Be Willing**. How willing are we to trust **in God’s good time**? Little kids, you want to grow up so fast and do stuff, but it’s hard to be patient and wait for **God’s time**, isn’t it? Maybe you’re six and a half, but want to be thirteen! Is it any easier for teenagers? First, you’re waiting to get the car keys, but when you do, it’s hard to slow down to the speed limit or focus on school work more than your friends. How many times did my dad say, “Slow down, Mark, slow down”? I often remember my Granddad, “Haste makes waste.” – usually after I mess things up. Not one of us is patient and **Willing for God’s time** as we ought to be. We hate standing in line, but fail to see the long line of humanity heading for hell because of sin. In our twilight years we grow impatient to be done down here and home at last in heaven. “How long, O Lord?” we cry! “How long?”

Time is another reason I’m so glad that Jesus is my Savior. He proved by His coming that God is **“patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”** (2 Peter 3:9 NIV84)

By His suffering Jesus shows that God *“does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.”* (Lamentations 3:33 NIV84) That’s why Jesus was so determined to do God’s will **in God’s time**. Jesus is stubborn to save. Listen how He answers Herod’s threat: *“Go tell that fox, ‘I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’”* Jesus would help people first, but His **goal** was finally to die on the cross. You know why? To wash away our every stain of impatience with God and each other. *“On the third day I will reach my goal.”* Christ came to conquer sin, death and hell by rising again. No one would scare Him away from His **goal** as every step took Him closer to torture on the cross. Yet, *“I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day – for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!”* So many spokesmen for God had pleaded in God’s Name to His chosen nation of Israel. But one after another died at the hands of sinners who would not bend their **in God’s time**. Yet God kept sending prophets until the Prophet Jesus pleads: **Be Willing ...**

✦ for the Lord’s mercy (vv.34-35)

Do you realize there would be no family arguments or broken marriages if only we could live and love this little word **mercy**? *“Blessed are the merciful,”* Jesus says in the *Beatitudes*, *“for they shall be shown mercy”* (Matthew 5:7), and we all nod our heads as if we’re some of mercy’s brightest flowers. But if someone comes to church like Jan Mosher described on the back page of *Forward in Christ*,¹ how do we react? Jan remembers Charley “looked as if he had just stepped off skid row – watery eyes, unshaven, shaggy hair that looked unwashed. His clothes were apparently unwashed too. One look and I knew this was a man who had made a mess of his life and had put his body in grave danger. I felt no pity for him.”

Jan goes on to explain how she cared unconditionally for residents of the nursing home where she worked. They could not help suffering from old age. But old Charley had brought his problems on himself. Slowly Jan came to realize how clearly Charley knew this. He would call their pastor several times in a day needing reassurance of God’s forgiveness. Charley came to nearly every worship service and Bible Class. And when someone asked what he did when he worked in the auto plant, Charley answered, “I did heroine, coke, marijuana, booze, and cigarettes.” Then he added, “But Jesus saved me.” Finally, Jan understood Charley’s lesson in **mercy**. Jesus has saved us too from our judgmental attitudes.

In the touching conclusion to her story, “Forgiven Sinners,” Jan Mosher tells how she found herself next to Charley at the Communion rail kneeling for Lord’s Supper. It was her custom with her husband to hold hands as they received the blessing. That day with her other hand she reached over and took Charley’s. She felt his fingers take hers. Afterwards when she glanced at him, she says he smiled the size of Texas. They were celebrating **the Lord’s mercy** as sinners forgiven together.

That’s how our gracious God bends our stubborn self will to match His. **The Lord’s mercy** longs to give His loving kindness to all. Can you see the tears on Jesus cheeks as He pleads? Can you feel centuries of raindrop tears from God in heaven as these words echo across the centuries? *“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 not willing.”*

If you try to come between a mother hen and her chicks, the violent flurry of feathers and squawking will convince you to back off. To get to her chicks you’ll have to go through her. To get to God’s people our worst enemies of sin, death and hell had to go through Jesus. Maybe “hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,” but hell has nothing close to God’s fury as His own Son protects and defends His Church. God only wants us to yield our will in order to accept **the Lord’s mercy – in God’s time**, before it’s too late. *“Look,”* says Jesus to the Jews He loves, *“your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”*

Palm Sunday, we see Jesus come to Jerusalem while people shout, *“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.”* But today, give your heart to God. His mercy still pleads: **Be Willing**. Amen.

¹ “Forgiven Sinners,” by Jan Mosher. *Forward in Christ*, February 2013. (Order at 1-800-662-6022)

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