

In the name of Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

Would you want to know when you're going to die? It's the kind of question that brings all kinds of different responses. I ran across an online poll of 29 people who were asked this question. 16 said "Yes I would want to know". 11 said, "No, I don't want to know". Two more couldn't decide.¹ The people who wanted to know thought it would help with things like their retirement planning and accomplishing their goals. Then they'd know how much money they would need to save, how long they should work, and how much time they had left to travel and knock things off their bucket list. The people who didn't want to know thought it would put a downer on the rest of their life. They'd fixate on it, or even try to avoid it.

The "knowing when you're going to die and trying to avoid it" plot has found its way into all kinds of fiction and movies. Characters get some kind of premonition about when they are going to die and they spend all their time trying to avoid their "Final Destination". That was even a movie series. There's another one where there's an app your phone that counts down the hours and minutes you have left. Though it's a popular question and plot, for us it's kind of a moot point because, even if we wanted to, it's impossible for us to know exactly how and when we are going to die. And even if we could know, it would be impossible for us to do anything about it. **Our times are in God's hands.** (Psalm 31:15)

However, today we see Jesus faced with this same kind of dilemma. He's warned about his impending doom, as if he needed to be warned. With him being the very Son of God, if anybody could know in advance and do something about it, it would be him. And yet, we know how the plot goes as **Jesus presses on to his final destination, crushing every shortcut along the way.** We'll examine what that means for him and what that means for us.

The warning of doom comes from the unlikeliest of places, the Pharisees, who had typically made themselves enemies to Jesus. They come to Jesus and say, **"Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you."** (Luke 13:31). It's hard to say whether this was a genuine warning from the Pharisees because they were concerned for his safety, or whether this was more of a threat intended to get Jesus to go away. Based on Jesus' track record and confrontations with the Pharisees, the first option, that they were concerned seems pretty unlikely. Whatever the case, they assumed that Jesus' response would be to listen and to go away. They assumed the only sensible thing to do was to try and avoid pain, avoid hardship, and avoid death. They assumed that the threat of impending death would make Jesus run in the opposite direction for his life.

But for Jesus to do any of those things would have meant him exiting his journey to the cross. It would have meant him abandoning the Father's plan set out for him from the creation of the world. Though at first, it may seem like the sensible thing to do to try to not get killed, the Pharisees' directions presented the easy way out, the path of least resistance, a departure from his mission, and a shortcut around the cross.

Imagine if Jesus had taken it! One quick, easy, and feasible shortcut. Imagine if the words Christ-crucified were never spoken. What then? Then we'd still be in our sins. Then death would still be king. Guilt would hang around our necks like Jacob Marley's chains in *A Christmas Carol*. The shortcuts we take to find happiness would drop us like a clothes-shoot into hell. Whether it's quick relief in substances or pictures or fantasies or likes on your post. Whether its

¹ <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/karinabland/2019/06/07/would-you-want-know-when-youll-die-planning-for-retirement-karina-bland/1370494001/>

money that we think can use to buy our way to a life of luxury and ease. Or we think the way to get where we want to go faster is by climbing over others and stomping them down as we go.

Shortcuts are the path well-traveled. We could almost call them the American way. The world we live in says, “Do whatever it is that you think will make you the happiest, the fastest. Doesn’t matter who it hurts, doesn’t matter what God says about it, as if He wouldn’t want you to be happy anyway.” We set fleeting happiness up like a golden calf next to God and bow down to it. But don’t let yourself be fooled into thinking that shortcuts aren’t dangerous or even deadly. You wouldn’t tell the people building the house that you sleep in to take as many shortcuts as possible if you knew it meant the whole thing was going to come crashing down on you some windy night.

It’s because of all the shortcuts we’re prone to that we see just how important the words Jesus spoke next truly are for us. He replied to the Pharisees, **“Go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’”** Jesus was not going to be dissuaded from the work the Father had given him. His miracles were bearing witness and confirming his identity as the Son of God, and he was going to keep on doing them. You even hear Jesus starting to foreshadow the events of the following week when he says, **“on the third day I will reach my goal.”** The Greek word for reaching his goal, is the same root word used on the cross when he cried out, “It is finished.” And the mention of the “third day” rings like a bell in our ears pointing us ahead to Jesus’ final destination.

What a bold response this was spoken to an insidious ruler like Herod Antipas. This was the man, whose Father, Herod the Great, had tried to kill Jesus as a baby. This was also the man who had already beheaded John the Baptist, at the request of his daughter. It almost seems like Jesus was trying to antagonize the Pharisees and Herod, trying to get himself killed.

In a certain sense, he was. He was turning up the heat, knowing his final destination would lead him through a cross. He was on a specific time table, knowing the time appointed for him was near at hand. He was managing the time until the right time when he would lay his life down as the Passover Lamb during the Passover. Don’t think that Herod and the Jews and Pilate could ever have put Jesus to death, had it not been his Father’s will and his own will to lay it down. For Jesus had said, **“No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” (John 10:18).**

That’s the destination to which Jesus is pressing on when he says, **“I must press on today and tomorrow and the next day—for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem.” (Luke 13:33).** He’s pressing on to his own death, the moment he would lay down his life. He knows exactly where and when and how it will happen, and he is determined to go towards it and not away from it. No shortcuts, no pain-relievers, no sidestepping the thing that his own inexplicable love and desire for us demands he must do. He must go to the place where they kill the prophets, Jerusalem, the name which ironically means “city of peace”.

If he stays outside Jerusalem or goes to another place, like the Pharisees told him, he’s not going to be killed. But he knows his journey to the cross, to Jerusalem, must go on. ***Jesus must press on to his final destination.*** Salvation requires it, and Jesus resolves to do it, his Father’s will, his own will, even if it means that nails and spears shall pierce him through. The cross he’ll bear for me, for you² (What Child Is This). He must finish what he was born to do!

² Dix, William. “What Child Is This” Christian Worship 93. NPH.

The cross, the grave, but remember and do not forget that his final destination is not death and burial, but life that never ends. And there is no shortcut that will get you there.

Every shortcut is crushed beneath the holy determination and resolve of a Savior who would not lay aside his mission for anything in all the world. He ensured that the words Christ-crucified would hold the power that they do, power over death, the power of forgiveness, and power for us to live along with him.

Now if you leave today thinking that the whole point of our meditation amounts to this, “Jesus was determined so you should be more determined too,” then I have failed you as a preacher and I’m sorry you wasted your time. Because that thought will amount to nothing! There is probably nothing that you have more consistent proof of in your life than the fact that your determination has failed over and over again.

The famous question “What would Jesus do?” brings you no power to do it. And if that’s all Christ is to you, a wise guide, a nice role model, then you’re still in your sins. See instead that Christ is so much more than that! Forgiveness, new life, and power lies in what Jesus has already done as your substitute, your Savior, on your behalf! His determination is your determination. His obedience is your obedience, his death your death, and his life your life.

As the Apostle Paul writes, **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” (Galatians 2:20).** Your final destination is not death and the grave either, but life in him. Just as you have died with him, so he raised you to life with him. As Christ lives in you, he bolsters your legs under the weight of the cross you must carry. He empowers you to deny yourself and walk along with him. As his word lights your path and takes hold of your mind and will, he closes your eyes to shortcuts of this world of death and opens them to see the freedom of doing his will. **“The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20b)** And so you too, by his power and life working in you, may press towards with endurance towards your final destination, life after death, life that knows no end. Amen.

“Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:1,2