

STUDY 2

**Threats from Herod
Luke 13:31-35**

READ the passage.

Jot down what you think it is about.

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**Thinking About How You Read
The Passage**

Is Jesus a troublemaker who needs pulling into line by those responsible for good order? Is the king just being vindictive? Or, is the king's name being used by others? Our reading will be shaped by our gut reaction to those with power and authority, and by how we view Jesus. For example, how do you react to words like 'well-off or rich', 'trade unionists', 'CEOs', 'women/men', 'migrants', or 'the government'?

Do you feel most comfortable with those who have position, power and wealth in our society, or with those who are poor and marginalised? When you hear the word 'Herod', is this a word with positive images or negative ones?

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Who are the people in our society who make it hard for Christians to be faithful to Jesus?

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Have you had an experience of people trying to stop you from following Jesus? If so, how did that make you feel?

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**Thinking About Luke 13:31-35
With Our Partners**

Who causes problems for Christians, and how does that make us feel about those who caused problems for Jesus? One of the issues for Christians in Australia is whether they understand how real evil and opposition to Christians is, in some parts of the world. In this section we are challenging the generally held view that Christians don't face much real opposition, and so we don't have much sense of what Jesus faced. What can we learn from our partners about opposition?

To our partners: 'Who are the people like Herod in your community, the people with power who threaten you and your ability to follow Jesus?'

Our partners said that the Herod-like people in their community are powerful political Islamic leaders with arms, false church leaders (with no call to serve God's people), the witchdoctors, the community chiefs who impose themselves on their people, and leaders of non-believers and non-followers of Christ. There are those who seek to impose alcoholic bars and drugs on the communities where they are not wanted. They mentioned the police, chiefs, MPs, councilors, security operatives, politicians, religious fanatics, the dominant caste, and the bureaucrats.

The tribe masters in Timor have a role as 'Herod' when they threaten and impede many people who follow Jesus. For example, many younger people from poor Christian families cannot meet their traditional pre-marriage obligations. Therefore, they cannot marry, their children cannot be baptised or have

a birth certificate, and consequently they cannot go to school. Also, people may be elected to church leadership because they are powerful in the community rather than because they are people who can best lead the church, or they might be elected because they are supported by powerful people and must follow their advice.

These comments suggest that there are powerful forces that oppose those who follow Jesus. How might this be a helpful insight for you as you think about this passage?

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What are the forces in our society that threaten us and our ability to follow Jesus?

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Going Deeper Into The Passage

One way to appreciate this passage is to consider that it is a clash of people in different social locations, protecting different interests. It is also about Jesus and his relationship with those with power.

During most of Jesus' life, Herod Antipas was the local, but Roman-approved administrator of Galilee and Perea, in contrast to Judea which was under the direct rule of a Roman governor. He came out of a family driven by the desire for power, and shaped by violence against all that stood in their way. His life was a web of cruelty and intrigue, and he was quite happy to put John the Baptist to death on a whim.

Other than Jesus, the real players in this passage, however, are the Pharisees. Luke consistently portrays them as enemies of the prophets and of Jesus. In 11:53 we are told that they are very hostile, or have deep resentment towards Jesus. Their history does

not suggest that they are likely to act in ways that protect Jesus.

They come to Jesus and say to him 'leave this place'. Jesus is already heading out of Herod's territory (Galilee) towards Jerusalem. Is he being encouraged to move faster? Or is there something much more sinister?

The reason they suggest he leave is that they claim Herod wants to kill Jesus. Given his history of violence and his treatment of John, this would seem a believable threat. But each time we have a reference to Herod seeking Jesus (9:9, 23:8) it is so he can talk to him or see a miracle performed. Even when he has a chance to kill Jesus, he sends him back to Pilate (23:11).

One must conclude that their message is a hostile one. They are testing Jesus' claim that he is doing God's will, and that it is to fulfill God's purpose that he must go to Jerusalem and die. If he heeds their warning and flees, he is a fake. If he goes to Jerusalem they will have to confront and reject his claims quite explicitly.

Jesus gives them a message: 'go tell that fox'. He calls their bluff. Are they really speaking for Herod and aligned with that political power? Then they can deliver the message back to him. But this is really rhetoric.

Will Jesus' ministry be shaped by the erratic behaviour of the king, or by the only slightly veiled threats of this group of religious leaders? He will not! He is convinced that God wishes for him to go to Jerusalem, to confront the powers that would oppose God's way of life. If he must die because of this act of obedience, then his life is in God's hands.

Jesus is in the place God called him to – teaching on the way to Jerusalem (13:22). He will not be pushed around by threats, or even by the real power of political leaders. Whatever Herod might think of his political power or his jurisdiction over Jesus, Jesus saw himself as having only allegiance to God and God's reign. He will not do things differently just because it might upset Herod.

As you think about the passage in the light of this reflection and our partners' reflection, what new insights or questions do you have?

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Our World

It is tempting for Western, reasonably well-off Christians to assume people have good motives, and to ignore the way people – including ourselves – act to protect our own interests. We trust that the rulers will do the right thing and that, generally, they will look after the welfare of the people.

Our partners in the Lent Event project teach us to be a bit more sceptical, as does our Gospel reading.

They also remind us that religious language and schemes also have economic and political

consequences. What we value and what we support has consequences for people's daily lives.

Part of the challenge of this study is to ask ourselves: If I am not being challenged in my discipleship, if people's circumstances are not making it difficult to follow Jesus sometimes, is that because I am too close to those with power?

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Name one situation where discipleship demands that you stand in a different place and confront those with power who are stopping the purposes of God. What can you do to move to that place?

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Project

How does this project challenge your social location, your place in the world and who you are most comfortable with? What does it say about your attempt to follow and be with Jesus?

Relief and Development Project 2
Integrated Tribal Development

Location – Nilgiri Hills, South India
Partner Church – Church of South India

The Situation

The Adivasi or 'forest people' are the highly marginalised indigenous people of India. Traditionally they have relied upon the forest for survival. Recently however, the people have been pushed to the outer regions of the forests. Their land has been taken over by cash crop plantations restricting access to the natural resources that they relied on. The Adivasi do not possess any identification papers and as a result they are not recognised by the government and are denied access to electricity and education. Almost all the tribal community live below the poverty

line with high levels of ill health due to a lack of education and economic resources. Most children do not receive schooling and those who do receive schooling leave when they are as young as ten, in order to work and earn money for their families to survive.

The Project

To address the various needs of the tribal people in the Nilgiris region, this project has a number of different strands. Beginning with the establishment of pre-schools for children aged 3-8 years, the project was then expanded to include self-help groups for women, vocational training and health care for the whole community. Through the self-help groups, the tribal women are becoming empowered and self-sufficient, reducing the likelihood of their being exploited by people outside their community. The project also assists people to establish recognised identity and obtain government documents so that they can access government services and facilities.