

**Matthew 23:37-39**

37 "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 38 See, your house is left to you, desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

When Jesus is in Jerusalem during Passion Week he is engaged in several antagonistic encounters from the main religious groups. The opposition against him has multiplied significantly since his arrival in Jerusalem. However, Jesus emerges victorious from all of the attacks. There are several reasons for this; he is smarter, more reverent, has a solid moral character, his divine status is beyond their manipulation, and he has a solid theological grounding. They simply cannot defeat him in the open public arena.

Jesus accuses the scribes and Pharisees with three major indictments. The first charge is hypocrisy. They do not practice what they teach. They teach the Mosaic Law but the problem is not what they teach, the problem is hypocrisy, they put heavy burdens on others and do not help those in need. The rules and regulations have degenerated to a point where it is so cumbersome that no human could possibly live by all the laws. They were so focused on the extremity of the regulations that they neglected the care of others. The second charge is impressionism. They were mainly interested in appearances. What they did was for show in order to be seen by others. The third charge deals with a superiority complex. They consider themselves to be better than others.

While in Jerusalem during Passion Week, Jesus speaks of Jerusalem killing the prophets and personally grieves over Jerusalem. This brings us to today's Scripture. We see heartfelt compassion and sorrow from the one that knows. Judgment waits for Jerusalem because Jerusalem murdered those sent by God. Jesus knows what they have done to the prophets of the past, Jesus knows what they are going to do to him, and Jesus knows God's righteous judgment. Jesus uses a metaphor of love. Like a mother hen he would like to protect them but cannot because they are stubborn. They rejected him and his teaching, refused to repent and change. This means that they are on a steady course of destruction. Jesus feels sorry for them. He would like to protect them like a mother hen protects her young when she covers them with her wings.

Many years ago I read a story about a fireman in the remnant of a forest after a forest fire. He was walking through the smoking forest and came up to a tree where he noticed a dead bird with its wings spread out. He nudged it and notice underneath here wings were living baby birds. When the fire came, the mother kicked them out of the nest and then gathered them together. She put them behind the tree, opposite of the flames, and then covered them with herself. She sacrificed herself for them. If the baby birds were not obedient and rebelled against their mother then they would have died. The people that Jesus weeps over rebelled against God. Jesus knows the consequence of this. He is heartbroken because he loves them but can't protect them because of their stubborn obstinance.

The contemporary lesson for us is a matter of understanding how the heartache of Jesus applies in society today. Jesus can save the people but the people must have humility. They need to be willing to listen, follow, and believe. Obstinance stands in the way of salvation. In society today, I see too many - way too many - with callous attitudes, hardened hearts, and angry

temperament, that are self righteously indignant and judgmental of others. Too many do not care about the poor, hungry, or homeless.

Years ago while I was preparing to go into ministry I talked with several different preachers about the pros and cons, joys and frustrations of being a pastor. Two in particular with doctorate degrees had contrasting attitudes. In reference to his degree one preacher said “It don’t mean anything, doesn’t mean more money, doesn’t get better jobs, and doesn’t deserve any high honor.” The other preacher said “George, when we are in public you need to call me doctor.” I laughed. He was uneasy that I laughed. I said “I’m sorry, I’m on a first name basis with Jesus.”

Jesus teaches against taking a stand of superiority. Taking a stand of superiority makes you less like Jesus and more like the religious leaders that stood in opposition to him. Jesus teaches equality, humility, and justice. The people in the Bible that rejected Jesus did so because of obstinance, they were stubborn in spite of reason, and refused to change. They rejected Jesus because he taught about giving up selfish desire and social prominence. The religious leaders were acting on greed, vanity, and classism. They rejected humility and care for others. In so doing, they actually rejected God. People reject Jesus today for the same reasons whether it is a matter of being obstinate, selfish, or self righteously indignant. The reasons people reject Jesus are explained very well in parable of sower. The seed that fell on the path are those that do not understand because of evil. The seed that fell on the rocks have no root and fall at times of persecution. The seed that fell in the thorns are choked out by the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth.

Be the seed that fell on good soil. Produce a good crop. The followers of Jesus are not preoccupied with rank and prestige. In Christ we are all equal. We are all servants of God. It is those with humility that will be exalted. Jesus gives a word of hope to those who listen, have humility, and are willing to change.