

October 6, 2019

“Lament over Jerusalem”
Matthew 23:37-39

FCF: Minds dulled to the wondrous realities about Jesus
PROPOSITION: (magnet) Jesus says some truly surprising things.
 (anchor) And we need to take them seriously.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Tennessee roads are now “hands free,” meaning you can send messages and make calls only so long as your device is hands-free or voice-activated. The desire is to cut down on distracted driving. And that is good. But it does not address another issue - drowsy driving, getting behind the wheel while sleep deprived. Some studies indicate that this can be as bad, if not worse, as drunk driving. We’re speeding down the road, dulled to what’s going on around us.

Having one’s mind dulled in traffic can be analogous to being dulled to spiritual matters, to Jesus Himself. It’s to be unresponsive, unmoved when there is so much that should move us.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 23:37-39](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

As a reminder of where we are, let’s remember the context. It’s Holy Week. On Sunday, Jesus had ridden into the city and was hailed as the king. On Monday, He entered the Temple and cleansed it as if it was His own. On Tuesday, He returned and not only warned the people about the religious authorities but He warned the religious authorities themselves, pronouncing seven stern “woes” upon them. These were hard things said that needed to be taken seriously.

Which brings us to our text. Here we see a shift from shouts of rebuke to cries of lament, from powerful denunciation to sorrowful disappointment. Jesus says some truly hard things. But He also says some truly surprising things. And we need to take them seriously as well.

What are these surprising things? There are two. First, the way Jesus speaks of the passion of God for His people. And, second, the way Jesus speaks of the presence of God with His people. Both of these are truly surprising things. And we need to take them seriously.

I. THE PASSION OF GOD FOR HIS PEOPLE

First, the way Jesus speaks of the passion of God for His people ([READ Matthew 23:37](#)).

A) Vivid Imagery

This is quite striking - perhaps unexpected, certainly unforgettable. It is vivid imagery.

1. From nature

A mother bird protecting her young under her wings. It’s an image of strength and tenderness.

2. From the Old Testament

And it comes from the Old Testament. There we read of the Lord longing to gather His people ([READ Psalm 106:47; 147:2](#)). Not just gathering but sheltering ([READ Psalm 17:8-9; 91:4](#)).

B) Vivid Reality

These vivid images point us towards vivid realities, things we desperately need to know.

1. Divine mercy

Divine mercy. God's shelter from the elements and exposure, protection from predators. Mercy is love for the one in need, help for the helpless, the powerful coming alongside the powerless.

2. Divine grace

This is divine mercy. And even more, it is divine grace. It is love not just for the one in need but love for the guilty, gathering the children of the one who has betrayed you. All this is in the context of care for those who would kill the prophets and stone the messengers. This is grace.

Jesus is speaking of the passion of God for His people. But note this. He speaks not just "like God," merely quoting. He speaks "as God," as the One who has been saying this all along.

Illustration:

And as God, Jesus presses in with the mercy and grace of God. That is why the Gospel stands out. Think of karma, the idea that what a person reaps in this life, good or bad, is the result of deeds in a past life. If that's true, we should feel burdened, trying to make amends for our bad record. Well, karma isn't true. Bono, the lead singer of U2, was right ([READ quote](#)):

I'd be in big trouble if karma was going to finally be my judge. I'm holding out for grace. I'm holding out that Jesus took my sins onto the cross, because I know who I am, and I hope I don't have to depend on my own religiosity... The point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world, so that what we put out did not come back to us, that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death.

Application:

([READ Matthew 23:37](#)) How we need to hear these words spoken over us. In the times of our turning from Him, this is Jesus' posture towards us, reaching towards us. And in the times when others turn from us, His posture towards us needs to then shape ours towards them. Not negating matters of justice and restitution, but still reaching out not to strike but to embrace.

Jesus says some truly surprising things. And we need to take them seriously.

II. THE PRESENCE OF GOD WITH HIS PEOPLE

But He also speaks of the presence of God with His people ([READ Matthew 23:38-39](#)).

A) Vivid Statement

This is a vivid statement. Really any mention of the Temple would have been in that day.

1. The status of the Temple

Keep in mind its status. It was a striking work of architecture. And central to Israel's identity.

2. The demise of the Temple

Jesus speaks of its sure demise, coming in 70 A.D. by the Roman army. The "house" was God's dwelling place. And it would be "desolate," abandoned and deserted not by man but by God.

B) Vivid Reality

That was a vivid statement. And it was pointing towards an even more vivid reality.

1. Shocking explanation

Jesus gives a shocking explanation for this ([READ Matthew 23:38-39](#)). The Temple's desolation was tied to Jesus' departure. Think about it. The Temple's desolation was tied to His departure.

2. Shocking implication

What did that mean? There's a shocking implication here and there's no escaping it. Jesus, the One standing there in their midst on the Temple steps, is the presence of God in the flesh.

Jesus speaks not just of but as the presence of God with His people. Not just of but as.

Illustration:

Some of you may know of the Stan Lee cameos in the Marvel movies. Iron Man, Spider-Man, Captain America, the Avengers - Stan Lee just kept showing up, all to the delight of the fans. He loved doing it. And it really didn't take much. Just show up, film a clip, and go home.

Jesus was not satisfied with a cameo. He went "all in" and wrote Himself into the story.

Application:

He is Immanuel, God with us. Before His coming, it had always been God over, above, and before us. God on the mountain, in the cloud, in the Temple. But with Jesus, God with us.

The implications? We are never alone. He is ever present no matter what we may feel. We are never alone. And we never need doubt His love. There's nothing in us that can explain it. But there is something erupting forth from His mercy and grace such that He is determined to be with us. And that is really good news. Really good. Do you know that this morning?

Jesus says some truly surprising things. And we need to take them seriously.

CONCLUSION:

But let's be clear. This passage is not just surprising because of the sharp turn from the shouts of denunciation to the cries of lamentation. It is surprising because only God could speak this way. Again, Jesus is speaking as God. Which is just who Jesus knows Himself to be.

This is a critical part of the Gospel. This is precisely who the Church has known and professed Jesus to be for 2,000 years. Think back to the creed we declared just a little while ago. Now why is this point important? Why is it vital that we be crystal clear on just who Jesus is? Two reasons. First, only if He is God should we bother to listen to Him. Think of what we hear from Him, the words handed down to us - rebukes and commands, parables and promises, insight and assurances. Only if He is God should we bother to listen to Him. That's the first thing.

The second thing is this. Only if He is truly God can He really save. Only if He is truly God should we bother to listen. And only if He is truly God can He really save. Think of how the Bible describes our need - to be redeemed, freed from the penalty and power of sin by the life of another given in our place. No mere human being - finite and fallen - could do this. This is a rescue mission none of us is qualified to undertake. We all need to be rescued but none of us could ever hope to accomplish it ourselves. No one else could do this. It had to be the God-man.

Jesus says some truly surprising things - things about the passion of God for His people and the presence of God with His people. Surprising things. We need to take them seriously.

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