

Matthew 23: 37-39; “As a Hen Gathers Her Chicks”, A Palm Sunday Sermon
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 14th, 2019,
In the Afternoon Worship Service.

Today is Palm Sunday, and efforts will be made this week by many churches to focus our attention, and the attention of many sinners in our community, upon the facts of the gospel; of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem, His sufferings leading up to the cross, His crucifixion, and His resurrection from the dead which will be celebrated by many next Sunday. Now, although I do not believe that the Lenten Calendar is something which we are commanded to follow, as an observance in our churches, (we do not see it anywhere commanded in the Bible, and we have the Lord's supper in which to remember His death, and we have the Lord's Day on which to be reminded of His resurrection from the dead; these things being commanded of Christ's Church), yet it is the hope of many sincere Christians in many church settings, that many more people would come to consider the glory of Christ and His passion for the salvation of needy sinners through this means of observing these days; and that many might come to sense the need of their own souls to be saved by Him.

Truly, we should understand that it is the teaching and preaching of the word of God on these subjects which is both precious and most important to God's people, and bringing people to hear the preaching of the word is a good witness to this community, and the communities that we represent. So, this afternoon I want to speak to you about these amazing words spoken by the Lord Jesus as a lament over Jerusalem so that you might see His passion for the salvation of Jerusalem sinners. We will look 1st of all at the Charge which the Lord Jesus brings against Jerusalem as a city. (verse 37a) 2nd – We will look at the Longing of Christ to gather these Jerusalem sinners to Himself. (verse 37b) And 3rd – We will look at the Desolation of unbelief and the Blessedness of faith in Christ. (verses 38 and 39) It is my prayer that each of us would see in the desire and actions of our Lord Jesus, the ultimate model of a soul-winner, and that each of us would, by God's grace, develop every good longing in ourselves for the salvation of sinners, and bring those longings into fruition, in thinking of how we ourselves might be wise and win souls to Christ.

1st of all – Let's look at the Charge which our Lord Jesus brought against Jerusalem as a city. (verse 37a)

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her!” Now, it is important that we understand that the Lord Jesus was a Man who was on a mission. He was sent by His Father for the salvation of particular sinners. He was sent first to the Jews; God's special Old Testament people, to proclaim the truth to them as the Son of God. He was sent to them as their Ultimate Prophet. During His earthly ministry His primary personal mission was to Jerusalem and to all Israel. His mission was to declare the truth concerning Himself and the gospel to the Jews of His day, and particularly in the last days of His ministry, to the rulers and leaders of the nation of Israel. They were responsible for leading the people in relation to God's word, the Old Testament Scriptures, and the Lord Jesus knew that He must confront them concerning their rejection of Himself as the Son of God and their Messiah; His being their Promised Lord and Savior.

But in John chapter 1, verse 11 it says – “He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him.” Now, in another place, in Mark 12: 37, it says that the common people heard Him gladly. But these words in John 1 here, are telling us that the majority of those people who were prominent and religious among the Jews did not receive the witness of Who Jesus was, or what He came to do and to teach them. They rejected the idea that He was God's only-begotten Son. They did not receive His miracles and good works as proving that He was sent from God. This was especially true of the most influential and powerful people in Israel; the scribes, the Pharisees, and the rulers of Israel. They were most zealous for the law, and they should have been able to recognize Jesus

for Who He was and what He had come to do, and they should have received Him. But they did not. Let us understand that a city is known by her leading men. This is why Jesus says, O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets. It had often been the case in the history of Israel that the leaders had killed the prophets. And so, Jesus uses the words Jerusalem, Jerusalem to address those who were the leaders and the most influential among them, especially, and then all the other unbelieving people as well. If those who are the leading men are righteous, then the people of that city will oftentimes follow the lead of those men. If their leaders are unrighteous, then they will promote things being done in that city which are not good; things which are displeasing to God, and harmful to many people.

What the problem was here, Jesus said, was that the scribes and Pharisees were sitting in Moses' seat. They held to the law of Moses, but they did not hold to it as pointing them to Christ, as Deuteronomy 18 says that they should have. In that place, it speaks of Christ as the Prophet whom God would send to them, who they must hear. But instead of receiving Jesus, and His teaching of grace, they held to the law of Moses as something which they thought that they could keep, on their own; that they did not need to be saved from their sins. They did not need grace to be given to them by Christ. Let us see from this that the law cannot save anyone. It has no power to do so. It has power to command what God expects, but has no life to give to fulfill its dictates. These leaders did not believe that Christ was the only One who could fulfill the law, and thus bring salvation to all who believed in Him. It is true that the law is good and righteous and holy, and Christ affirmed those men who were representing God's law, in every way that He should have. He said to those who were following their lead in Matthew 23: 3 – "Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."

So you see, the reason that Jesus was not received by these wicked scribes and Pharisees was because they thought themselves to be already righteous in God's sight, simply because they were Jews. They were trying to keep the law in their own legalistic way; by trying to do the works of the law apart from God's help and grace. They ended up trying to pull off this deadly religious charade with everyone around them. They outwardly appeared righteous to men, but inwardly they were full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. They believed that circumcision was their means of being brought into covenant with God, and that they did not at all need to believe in the Lord Jesus who was telling them that God was concerned with their heart obedience. God was not pleased with their adding human traditions and commandments to His law. Jesus said about them in Matthew 23: 13 – "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" "For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves nor do you allow those who are entering to go in."

But there was another problem which these scribes and Pharisees and rulers had which Jesus had to confront. It was that they wanted to kill Him and anyone who told them that their false system of religion was wrong. And so, Jesus told them a parable in Matthew 21: 33-46. He said – "Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and built a tower." "And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country." "Now when vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit." "And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another." "Again he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them." "Then last of all he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.'" "But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir.'" "come let us kill him and seize his inheritance."

"So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him." "Therefore when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" "They said to Him, 'He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.'" Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone." "This was the Lord's doing, and it is

marvelous in our eyes?” “Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.” “And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whoever it falls, it will grind him to power.” “But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.” So, one again, you can see here that these wicked “builders” among the leaders of the Jews were not bearing fruit unto God the Father at all. The Father is the landowner in the parable. And Jerusalem’s leaders, and all those who supported them, over many generations, were killing the prophets sent to her.

2nd – Let me now portray for you – The Longing of Christ to gather these Jerusalem sinners to Himself. (verse 37b)

“How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” I believe that this is one of the most amazing passages concerning Christ that we find in the Scriptures. He is saying that He, as the Son of God, two natures in one blessed Person, had often wanted to gather Jerusalem’s children together under His wings, and shelter them there in His care for them. Certainly He is speaking from His humanity which had longings, which as God He did not. For God’s affections are not like a man’s. But the affections of the Lord Jesus were perfect in both natures. I believe that we must understand that these longings of Christ’s humanity were fully approved of by the Deity which He was and is, and by the Father and the Holy Spirit. I do not believe that when He says “I wanted to gather you”, He is referring to anything hypothetical in the Divine Decrees that would make it appear that God would be frustrated in His plans for the salvation of all of His elect; particularly the elect among the Jews in that day. God is never ultimately resisted effectually when He stretches forth His hand to save, as is well seen in the conversion of Saul, the man who would become the apostle Paul.

What Jesus is saying here is that He had often wanted to gather “the children” of these men who had so wickedly opposed His ministry to Himself; but they, the ones whose fathers had killed the prophets and stoned those sent them, were not willing that they should be gathered to Him. Still, some of those who were rulers in Israel, Christ was, according to the purpose of the Father, able to gather to Himself on the Day of Pentecost and after. Men like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were gathered to Himself even before He died. He enunciates the principle of His gathering people to Himself in this way in Matthew 12: 30 – “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.” Jesus says to them in verse 31 of chapter 23 – “Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.” “Fill up, then, the measure of your father’s guilt!” “Serpents, brood of vipers!” “How can you escape the condemnation of hell?” He then goes on to state in verse 34 of chapter 23 that He was going to send to these same people, prophets and wise men and scribes: Some of them they would kill and crucify, and some of them they would scourge in their synagogues and persecute from city to city; that on them, would come all the righteous blood shed on the earth from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom they had murdered between the temple and the altar.

So, the Lord Jesus most certainly knew the hearts of all of the wicked rulers, and He left them to fill up the measure of their sins, and to the judgment of hell. He was not speaking mercifully to them, telling them that He had often wanted to gather them. They were wicked, and they would remain wicked, a brood of vipers from start to finish. But Jesus was saying that He oft wanted to gather those children who these wicked men held in the grasp of their false system; the false system of a works-righteousness of the scribes and the Pharisees. And indeed, He would gather some of these children through the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost after He had risen from dead, and ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of the Father. But it is the love of Christ to gather sinners to Himself that I want you to consider at this point. For our love for lost sinners should be as our Master’s was, and still is.

The picture here is very precious; that of the Lord Jesus comparing Himself in His desire to gather sinners to Himself, to a hen who gathers her chicks under her wings. He would gather them

in from their wanderings, as Matthew Henry says; gather them home to Himself. “He would have taken the whole body of the Jewish nation into the Church, and so gathered them all under the wings of the Divine Majesty.” Let us understand that within the parameters of God’s Divine Decrees there is a will of desire in God which is especially seen in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ when He speaks of Himself as the mother hen clucking for her chicks. There is a real interaction between God and men that is encompassed by the decrees that we should know about and attempt to better understand. If we attempt to do so, by meditating upon this text and others like it, we will better understand God’s sovereignty, man’s responsibility, and how we can better learn to show compassion to lost sinners. It is the love of Christ which constrains us.

3rd – Let’s look at the Desolation of unbelief and the Blessedness of faith in Christ.

In verses 38 and 39 Jesus says – “See!” “Your house is left to you desolate; for I say to you, you shall see Me no more till you say, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’” First the Lord Jesus pronounced a judgment of desolation upon Jerusalem that continues to this day. But He follows it with words of hope which are still His offer of mercy to the Jews unto this day. He is saying that the judgment of desolation would not last forever upon Jerusalem, but only until the time came when they would welcome Him as a nation; that time when they would say – “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the name of the Lord. Notice that Jesus is here addressing Jerusalem as the capital city of the nation. I have already showed you that Jesus didn’t simply pronounce the judgment that He did here with no feeling for the non-elect, or those who would perish because they were unwilling to come to Him and be gathered. He really felt for them; those who would perish! In Luke 19: 41 it says that when He drew near the city that He wept over it, saying, ‘If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace!’ “But now they are hidden from your eyes.” He went on to speak of how the days of judgment and vengeance would come to them in 70 a.d. because of their rejection of Him. They and their children within the city of Jerusalem would be leveled to the ground and they would not leave one stone upon another, because they did not recognize the time of their visitation.

But in this passage that we are looking at here today, we also find the Lord Jesus pronouncing a most certain end of their desolation, and a most certain hope of their restoration and their conversion when they together as a nation shall say – “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” And we find that hope confirmed in Luke 19: 37-40, the words that He spoke before He pronounced the judgment. “Then, as Jesus was drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: ‘Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!’ “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” “And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.” “But He answered and said to them, ‘I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.’”

Someday, the Jews who have been people whose hearts have been like stone will cry out – “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”, and God will “pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication”. Then they will look with eyes of faith upon the Christ whom they pierced. And they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. (Zechariah 12: 10) A fountain for sin and uncleanness shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (Zechariah 13: 1) And their desolation shall end. The Lord Jesus will be as a Hen who gathers her chicks. And under His wings they shall find refuge and eternal safety, blessing, and salvation. Let us pray to have more of the Lord’s heart in our heart, and tell others around us of how they can find refuge under His wings.