

Proposition: Based on the final words of Jesus' sermon recorded in Matthew 23:37-39, there are four important truths the Lord wants us to know.

- I. We need to know about the *patience* of God (37a).
 - A. Jerusalem was the city of peace.
 - B. Jerusalem also rejected God's messengers.
 1. God sent the prophets.
 2. Ultimately, He sent His Son.
- II. We need to know about the *passion* of the Savior (37b).
 - A. He wanted His people to be near Him.
 - B. Sadly, His people wanted something else.
- III. We need to know about the *penalty* of sin (38).
 - A. For the Jews, God's house became *your* house.
 - B. What was a place to meet God would soon be desolate.
- IV. We need to know about the *plan* of the Sovereign (39).
 - A. It involves the Jews.
 1. Phase #1: There will be a time of darkness.
 2. Phase #2: There's a light at the end of the tunnel.
 - B. It involves us.
 1. Jesus is the Lord of the universe.
 2. Is Jesus the Lord of your life?

It's Sunday. We're about to hear a message from God's Word, a *sermon*. Have you ever wondered what it would be like to hear a sermon preached by Jesus? Suppose Jesus entered this room, approached the pulpit, and began to speak. What would He say to us? We might be surprised.

One audience certainly was. It happened on a Tuesday, just two days after the Palm Sunday crowd applauded His entry into Jerusalem. The Savior entered the House of God. There was tension in the air. The common people had high hopes for this miracle worker from Galilee. But the religious leaders were skeptical, no, they were caustic in their insistence that He must go.

They'd tried to trap Him with trick questions, but failed. And they'd already set in motion a search for a wicked plot to eliminate Him. Quite an atmosphere in which to preach a sermon, wouldn't you say?

We've been examining that very message for the past six weeks, and this morning we come to Jesus' final words. For the first thirty-six verses of Matthew 23, Jesus uses strong language to warn the people of the danger of merely being religious. The Scribes and Pharisees prided themselves in their external religious efforts to please God. But seven times Jesus uttered this sober pronouncement upon them, "Woe to you!"

In the most potent of terms, Jesus used the scalpel of His words to peel away the shining veneer of an impressive religious system, and expose the ugliness of sinful hearts. He called the religious leaders "hypocrites" (13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). He said that everything they do is done for men to see (4). He called them "blind guides" (16, 24). He accused them of straining out a gnat but swallowing a camel (24). He likened them to a whitewashed tomb, decorative on the outside but full of deadness underneath it all (27).

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He called them snakes and vipers, and asked them this blunt question, "How will you escape being condemned to hell (33)?"

That's what we've heard for five weeks now. Jesus has piled warning on top of warning, using the most forceful language to indict those who thought they were right with God.

But the tone changes in verse 37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!" It reminds me of the story of the father who had not one, but *two* prodigal sons (in Luke 15). The first spurned his father's care, and requested his share of the inheritance. In essence he was saying, "Old man, your money means more to me than you do. I want it." He left, wasted away his life through sinful living, and in the end came home, won back by the unconditional love of his father.

You say, "But you stated there were *two* prodigal sons." There were. The story doesn't end with the return of the younger son. Remember the older son's reaction? He was filled with resentment and anger. The lavish love of his father incensed him, and he told him so. And the older son, the one who was so upright *on the outside* refused to come and be near his father and brother. He, too, was a prodigal, not in action, but in his heart. And the father loved *both* lost sons.

How do you help a "religious" prodigal, someone who claims to be okay with God, but refuses to surrender his heart to Him? In Matthew 23, Jesus speaks to such a person.

But this is no mere personal matter. In this sermon, Jesus is speaking to the representatives of the Jewish nation, the leaders who rejected Him. Matthew 23 addresses a corporate issue, too. The Messiah came unto His own, but His own did not receive Him (John 1:11). What was the result of that corporate rejection of the Messiah by Israel?

We're about to find out. I recognize that the words we are studying were intended for a Jewish audience in the first century. But as we listen carefully to the final words of Jesus' sermon recorded in Matthew 23:37-39, we'll discover four important truths the Lord wants us to know.

Listen to Jesus, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" Here's truth #1...

I. We need to know about the *patience* of God (37a).

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you." Why the repetition: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem."? It shows Jesus' love, like "Martha, Martha" did in Luke 10, and "Saul, Saul" did in Acts 9, and the angel's "Abraham, Abraham" did in Genesis 22. In a sermon so full of judgment, these parting words are a reminder of the incredible love of God for sinners. Bruner suggests that the doubling of the name gives a "tonality of sadness to the prophetic wrath (832)."

Oh, beloved, is God sovereign? Yes, indeed. But does His heart grieve when men reject Him? Yes, oh yes.

We need to keep in mind a couple of things about Jerusalem. First...

A. Jerusalem was the city of peace. That's what the name means, from the term *uru*, meaning "city," and *salim*, meaning "peace." Jerusalem--the city of shalom, the city of wholeness, the city of peace.¹

Jerusalem, of course, was the capital city of Israel. As such, it represented the entire nation for which Jesus mourned that day.

What a city, Jerusalem! David claimed it for Israel in the tenth century B.C. Solomon beautified it with grandiose building projects. Hezekiah watched God protect it by slaying 180,000 Assyrian aggressors. Jeremiah watched the Babylonians raze it in the sixth century, then Nehemiah rebuilt its walls after the exile. And on and on goes the list of amazing events associated with this city. Jerusalem, the city that housed the temple of God, was the city of God's shalom. Sadly, something else was true of it.

B. Jerusalem also rejected God's messengers. Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you." It's ironic when you consider the kind of welcome the city of peace gave to God's messengers--it was hardly peaceful! According to Jesus, Jerusalem had developed quite a reputation.

1. *God sent the prophets.* Time and time again God sent His messengers to Jerusalem to urge the people to repent and turn back to God. And time after time, instead of a red-carpet welcome, the only red the prophets saw was their own blood.

Hebrews 11:36-38 describes the fate of some, "Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted, and mistreated--the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground."

And some of that mistreatment happened right in Jerusalem. But it wasn't just a past-tense problem. Yes, they had killed godly men like Isaiah and Zechariah. But Jesus said, "You who *kill* the prophets and *stone* those sent to you." Present tense--they *did* it and were still *doing* it. Think of John the Baptist, and soon there would be Stephen, and James, and countless others.

Do you see the patience of God in this? "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who stone the prophets and stone those sent to you." God sent the prophets, and they were rejected. but that's not all.

2. *Ultimately, He sent His Son.* Behold the amazing patience of God! The Lord wanted to restore Israel to Himself. Even when He sent the Assyrians to devastate the land it was to get their attention. And when He sent the Babylonians, it was a wakeup call. He sent the prophets to confront their waywardness, and to urge them to repent--because He loved them.

But time and time again the people--the nation God Himself chose--resisted God and rejected His messengers, to their own shame and harm.

And then God sent His own Son, not to whip them into shape, though He could have, nor to scold them into submission, but to win them with unconditional love. He came as a lowly servant. He healed their sick, fed them when they were hungry, taught them life-giving words, and offered them hope. Indeed, He offered them *Himself*.

And they spurned His offer. They rejected *Him*. Yet still He loved them. How marvelous is the patience of God!

¹*I.S.B.E.* article, "Jerusalem."

Dear friend, how indebted we are today to the patience of God! He gives us life, health, jobs, and families, and what do we do? So often, we ignore Him. We pour our lives into the things He gives us, and forget Him. So He sends us wakeup calls, and how do we respond? By criticizing Him for not caring? Beloved, let's thank God this morning for His patience. Here's truth #2...

II. We need to know about the *passion* of the Savior (37b).

Do you hear Jesus' passionate love in these words? "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings." What did Jesus say He desired?

A. He wanted His people to be near Him. We see the eternality of the Lord Jesus here. "How often I have longed to gather your children," He says. How often, not just in the past thirty-three years, but throughout the nation's 1,400 year spiritual roller coaster ride.

Several years ago Sherry and I lived near a lake that was home to several ducks. There was also an aggressive swan that roamed the waters. In the Spring it was interesting to watch the mother ducks as they took their babies out for a swim. They moved through the water in single file formation--*until* the swan approached. Then the mother called her offspring to her protective care. She sheltered her young with her loving wings. She wanted her young to be near her--for their own good. It would be sheer folly and certain death for one of her little ones to ignore her call.

But, according to Jesus, that's what His people did to Him. He wanted them to be near Him. Yet...

B. Sadly, His people wanted something else. The last words of verse 37 are heart-breaking, "But you were not willing." The contrast is striking. Jesus says, "I would have...but you would not."

And so the tragic fate of Israel was sealed. "There is no argument here about divine sovereignty and human responsibility, for both are included," says Warren Wiersbe (86).

Remember there are different aspects of God's will. The Bible speaks of God's *decreed* will--that is certain and unchanging. But there's also God's *revealed* will. For reasons known only to God, the Lord permits people to act contrary to and in defiance of His revealed will. But He never permits them to act contrary to His sovereign will (see Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God*, p. 38).²

The issue in our text is God's revealed will. Here we see Jesus express His desire for something that did not come to fruition--at least not yet. His desire for Israel was to make Himself known both *to* her and *through* her to the world. It was His will for Israel to be near Him. But Israel resisted. Jesus said in John 5:40, "You refuse to come to me to have life."

Here is the very essence of sin--the human will in opposition to the will of God. And here also is the very essence of love--the Lord desiring to have sinners near Him.

²In support of the certainty of God's decreed will, consider the following Scriptures: Proverbs 16:9, "In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps." Proverbs 19:21, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails." Lamentations 3:37, "Who can speak and have it not happen if the LORD has not decreed it?" (Also: Prov 21:30; James 4:15; Rev 3:7)

Just think of it. The Lord needs nothing, but He desires for sinners to have fellowship with Himself. And He takes the initiative to make it possible. That's what the Cross is all about. Through Christ, God offers us intimacy and communion with Himself.

May I speak candidly? Christianity is not fundamentally a religion. It's a relationship between the Lord and His people. The Lord wants His people to be close to Him, near to Him and under His protection and care.

The question is, do you want what the Lord wants? Do you really want to be close to the Lord--more than anything else? God's heart is grieved when we resist His love.

Listen to Jesus: "O Jerusalem, how often I longed to gather your children near me, but you were not willing." Such is the passion of the Savior. Truth #3...

III. We need to know about the *penalty* of sin (38).

Jesus continues in verse 38, "Look, your house is left to you desolate." Look! Listen up! Pay attention! Behold! Something has happened to your house!

What "house" does Jesus have in mind? "House" could refer to the nation of Israel as a whole. It could also refer to the temple--the house of God--which seems more likely considering the context. Remember where Jesus is speaking--in the temple. And the very next subject He addresses in 24:1-2 is what? The coming destruction of the temple.

In verse 38 we learn about the terrible penalty of sin. Sin has consequences, and here Jesus spells out a twofold penalty.

A. For the Jews, God's house became *your* house. Verse 38, "Look, *your* house is left to you desolate."

God left His house! It's *your* house now, Jesus says. It used to be God's, but no longer. And specifically He says, "Your house is *left*." The verb means "abandoned." It's translated "neglect" in verse 23. It speaks not so much of the physical condition of the temple as of the fact that *God has departed from it* (France, 332).

The first words of chapter 24 are striking, "Jesus left the temple." He left it never to return. What makes the house desolate is this--the Master of the house is gone. Here's the second part of the penalty.

B. What was a place to meet God would soon be desolate. God's house became *your* house. As it turned out "*your* house" existed for another forty years. Then in A.D. 70, invading Roman armies decimated the city of peace, and Jerusalem (including the temple) lay in shambles. And to this day, the Jewish temple remains desolate.

The Jews certainly couldn't plead ignorance. The Lord warned Solomon of this very consequence when he built the first "house of God." At the temple dedication the Lord said this in 1 Kings 9:6-9, "But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name...And though this temple is now imposing, all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff and say, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?' People will answer, 'Because they have forsaken the LORD their God...'"

Six centuries before Christ, Jeremiah offered a similar warning (Jer 22:4-5), "For if you are careful to carry out these commands, then kings who sit on David's throne will come through the gates of this palace, riding in chariots and on horses, accompanied by

their officials and their people. But if you do not obey these commands, declares the LORD, I swear by myself that this palace will become a ruin."

Please realize there is a penalty for sin. A nation that rejects the Messiah is doomed to disaster. So is a church. Consider this warning by Frederick Bruner (834), "Churches that have the name of Christ but that are not in fact *centered in* and thrilled by Christ have Ichabod written over their doors." What a terrible thing it is to trivialize the Savior!

Here's the fourth truth. We need to know the patience of God, the passion of the Savior, the penalty of sin, and...

IV. We need to know about the *plan* of the Sovereign (39).

What about the plan? Notice first of all...

A. It involves the Jews. To the Jewish audience Jesus said this (39), "For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" God is sovereign. He operates by a plan. Nothing takes Him by surprise. When He entered into a covenant relationship with Abraham, He made it clear that He had a special purpose for Abraham's descendants.

In His plan, He took one man and formed a family. And He took that family and formed a nation--Israel. And through that nation He sent the Messiah into the world.

But the nation as a whole rejected the Messiah. So now what? What is God's plan for Israel? Though godly Bible scholars differ on this subject, I believe the Bible indicates there is a future for Israel. Right here in this text, Jesus explains that God's future plan for Israel involves two phases.

1. *Phase #1: There will be a time of darkness.* Listen to Jesus' prediction, "You will not see me again." To the Jewish leaders and to the people who followed those leaders Jesus said, "You won't see Me again."

He wasn't talking about physical sight--they would "see" Him for a few more days. But they wouldn't *see* Him again. Not as a nation. Yes, there would be a remnant of Jews who would accept Him, but the nation was now entering a time of darkness.

They had wasted opportunity after opportunity. First the prophets said, "He's coming!" And John the Baptist said, "He's here!" And Jesus said, "I am the way!" But they refused to receive Him. They refused to let go of their religious system. And so phase one began, the time of darkness.

Is there hope? I believe there is.

2. *Phase #2: There's a light at the end of the tunnel.* Notice the next word: *until*. "You will not see me again *until* you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

Jesus here quotes from Psalm 118:26. Psalm 118 is a great messianic psalm, one that was quoted many times during Jesus' last week of ministry. It's noteworthy that the crowds used these very words just two days before (Matt. 21:9) when they shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Baruch haba B'shem Adonai! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

The Jewish crowds spoke those very words, but the religious leaders did not. In fact, according to Matthew 21:15 the Jewish leaders were *indignant*. And sadly, in just a few days the fickle crowd would change their tune from *Hosanna* to *Crucify him!*

Luke tells us something about Palm Sunday that Matthew omits. Luke tells us that after the crowd cried (38), and after the Pharisees scoffed (39), Jesus approached

Jerusalem, looked at the city--and do you remember what He did? He *wept* over it. And He said (Luke 19:42-44):

"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace--but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

A holocaust is coming! And why? *Because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.* You didn't see Me. But you will.

When? On the day you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

The fact is, God is still revealing Himself through Israel. Even right now, according to Romans 9:22, through Israel's rebellion God is revealing His *wrath*. And during this time of Israel's hardening, God has extended His mercy to Gentiles (Rom. 9:23-24). And the day is coming when the Lord will gather Israel--His "chicks"--to Himself.

Paul explains in Romans 11. Verse 1--"Did God reject his people? By no means!" Verse 2--"God did not reject His people, whom he foreknew." Verse 5--"So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace." Verse 11--"Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious." Verses 23--"And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again."

Yes, right now is a time of darkness for the Jews. But there's a light at the end of the tunnel. The Messiah will return. And when He does, by God's grace, He will receive a very different greeting from the seed of Abraham, for they will say, *Baruch haba b'shem Adonai*.

With that prediction, Jesus finished His sermon. These are the last words Jesus spoke to the Jewish multitudes in Matthew's gospel. From this point on He focused on His disciples, speaking to them "privately" (24:3).

Know this, dear friend. There is a Sovereign in heaven who has a plan for this world. His plan involves the Jews, but don't stop there. His plan also...

B. It involves us. At the end of this age when Jesus returns, He will deliver Israel and defeat its enemies. Zechariah anticipated that day (Zech. 12). Paul spoke of it in Romans 11.

We who are Gentiles ought to thank God for the Jews. Jesus was born a Jew. Jesus loved the Jews. God used the Jews to give us the Scriptures. We ought to learn from the Jews.

When the Messiah came the first time, the majority of Jews clung to their religious system and missed Him. What have you done with Jesus the Messiah? The truth is...

1. *Jesus is the Lord of the universe.* He's the Sovereign One who has a plan. Yes, He is the Lord. But the question of all questions is this...

2. *Is Jesus the Lord of your life?* What He did on the Cross and at the Tomb wasn't just "for the world." It was for individuals who would believe in Him and surrender their lives to Him. Have you done so? If not, I invite you to do so today.