

Week of April 2 - 8

Jesus' Sorrow for Jerusalem (Luke 13:31-35)

Some Pharisees who were sympathetic to Jesus arrived and told him he should leave because Herod was conspiring to kill him. He grinned and told them, "Go tell that sly fox that I will be busy casting out demons and curing people until my mission is accomplished. Today, tomorrow, and the day after that, I will be a moving target. It wouldn't be fitting for me to be martyred anywhere but Jerusalem."

Jesus knew that God had predetermined the time and place of his death, and so Herod couldn't touch him until that time arrived. Meanwhile, he would occupy himself in the ministry his father had given him.

Deadened Hearts and Blinded Eyes (John 12:37-50)

Though he performed several miracles among them, some still didn't fully trust him. Isaiah prophesied, "Lord, who has believed what we had to say? Does anyone understand the Lord's power? He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts that they won't see or understand nor turn to me to heal them." Isaiah was speaking about Christ being revealed. But some of the chief rulers believed him, though none of them confessed it openly because the Pharisees had threatened to exclude them from the synagogue. They were generally more concerned about how they were perceived by men than how God perceived them.

Jesus said, "Anyone who trusts me isn't just trusting in me, but him who sent me. And anyone who observes me is looking at him. I came to enlighten the world so people won't have to abide in darkness. I won't condemn anyone who refuses to believe what I have to say. I haven't come to condemn people but save them. Those who reject me will be judged at the end of time, according to the words I have spoken. I haven't promoted myself, but have proclaimed what the Father sent me to convey. I know that his instructions lead to everlasting life. So I just say what he directs me to say.

Christ came to provide salvation for the world, but if people rejected that salvation, he became their judge because they refused his message. People who hear the truth are held responsible for the truth which they have heard. His final message to the multitude was an invitation to accept his words, trust his person, and receive eternal life.

Taxes to Caesar (Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:13-17; Luke 20:20-26)

Trying to snare Jesus, some Pharisees invited officers from the Roman government in Jerusalem to join them while they tried to trick him. "We know you are an honest and sincere man who is above flattery and only wants to teach God's truth," they stated to set him up. "Tell us then, should we pay taxes imposed by the Romans or distribute our resources among our people as God prescribed and directs our conscience?"

Jesus saw through their scheme and asked, "Why are you testing me?" he asked. "Does anyone have a coin I can use?" Someone gave him a penny and holding it up to them, he asked, "Whose image is engraved on this coin?" They replied that it was Caesar's. "Then give to Caesar that which bears his stamp. And," he paused, looking into their faces, "give to God that which bears his stamp." They hadn't anticipated such an amazing response and, dumbfounded and ashamed, they quietly slipped away.

Christ recognized the authority given to Caesar as God's servant, and therefore he confirmed that taxes must support Caesar. This didn't conflict with God's right to rule or nullify the fact that God will ultimately appoint his son as Messiah in Caesar's place.

Sadducees' Puzzling Question (Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27; Luke 20:27-40)

Later in the day, Sadducees (who don't believe in life after death) sought to trick him, asking, "Moses decreed that if a man's brother dies before having children, the brother next in line should marry his widow and honor his brother with children by that woman. There are seven brothers, and each one died before having any children with that woman. Finally, the woman died. Who will be her husband in the afterlife, seeing that all seven married her and none generated a family of his own?"

"You are mistaken because you misinterpret the scriptures and misunderstand God's intent," Jesus asserted. "Marriage and reproduction are for this world. Those who depart beyond this world are like angels and become spiritual beings. Don't you remember what God said to Moses from the burning bush? 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' He isn't a god of the dead, but God of the living. He is the God of life, and everything lives in his presence.

Those looking on were astounded by his logic. "Well said, Master," the scribes conceded. Afterward, they no longer tried to engage him in debates.

God should have said, "I was," if Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, were now dead, and there was no resurrection. But God said, "I am" their God, testifying to their existence and ultimate resurrection of their bodies.

The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34)

A Pharisee happened along and inquired, "What is the most important thing we can do to please God?" Jesus replied, "There is only one God, and you must revere him with every facet of your being, emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and physically. That is the preeminent thing you must do. And likewise, you must love others as you love yourself. Every other rule in the scriptures rests on these two precepts."

The Pharisees had codified the law into 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions and imposed them on their followers. Christ revealed how to follow all of their laws by the two precepts.

Question about David's Son (Matthew 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44)

Later Jesus posed a question to the scribes who taught that Christ would be subordinate to David. "David himself was inspired to refer to Christ as his lord. Did he not write the Psalm, 'The Lord said, 'come sit beside me while I bring your enemies into subjection?'" David, therefore, referred to Christ as his Lord. How can he be his descendant?" Common people had no problem following his logic, and from that day on, no one dared ask him any more questions.

"Watch out for religious leaders who like to wear their robes in public so they will be recognized in the market place and enjoy being singled out and shown respect. They cheat widows out of their estates, then pray eloquently to make a good show. They will be severely judged.

The Psalm taught the true humanity and the true deity of Christ, which he claimed about himself. The Pharisees realized their dilemma and refused to answer because of the wisdom which he spoke.

Seven woes against the Pharisees (Matthew 23: 1-39; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 20:45-47)

“The scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses seat, so do as they tell you,” Jesus told the crowd. “But don’t do as they do because they are hypocrites, putting heavy burdens on others, but don't lift a finger. Everything they do is for show. They wear grand prayer shawls and fancy robes and enjoy being seated among dignitaries at banquets or religious affairs. They love to hear men address them by eloquent titles like Doctor, Professor, or Counselor.”

Don’t present yourself as deserving of special attention or recognition. Christ is your Master, and everyone is equal under him. Don’t consider any man superior. Your father in Heaven is superior to anyone on Earth. He that serves others is truly the greatest among you. Whoever promotes himself will eventually be humiliated, and whoever humbles himself will ultimately gain respect.

“Look out, you scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You stand between men and Heaven and not only remain outside, but you interfere with those who aspire to go in. You devour widows’ resources pretending to be righteous. Yours will be the greater loss. You cross land and sea to convert someone to follow after you, and once he is committed, you groom him to become twice as vile as you are yourselves.

“Look out blind guides, who act as though the resources and administration under your care are more sacred than the faith and doctrine that have been entrusted to you. Fools! Which is more valuable, the gold in the Temple, or the cause to which it is dedicated? You’re bothered more by those who object to the way you use the resources of the Temple than you are by those who insult the doctrine of the Temple. ‘Which is more important, a material resource, or that which makes it meaningful?

“Whoever trusts in the altar must commit to everything on it. Whoever trusts in the Temple must commit to the one who dwells in it. Whoever trusts in the sovereignty of Heaven must commit to the one who sits on God’s throne.

“You give an appropriate portion of your material resources to the Temple and don’t pay attention to the more pressing matters of doctrine, discernment, mercy, and faith. It’s good to commit material resources, but not to neglect spiritual resources. You meticulously strain a gnat and then swallow a camel.

“You wipe the outside of the cup and saucer but leave them full of extortion and excess. Wash out the corruption inside the cup, and the outside will be clean as well. You are like whitewashed tombs that are lovely to look at from the outside but are filled with decomposing flesh and all sorts of contamination. You appear righteous to men, but inside, you are filled with hypocrisy and injustice.

“You build monuments to the prophets and polish the tombs of the righteous proclaiming that if you had been alive in their days, you wouldn’t have stood for the disrespectful way they were treated. You testify against yourselves because you are just like those that killed the prophets. You’re at least as bad as your ancestors. You snakes! You bunch of slithering reptiles! How can you escape damnation?

“Look, I inspire prophets to discover my truths and write them down. Some you crucify and kill. Others you scourge in your religious gatherings and persecute from city to city. All the righteous blood shed on the Earth rests on you, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was

slain at the altar in the Temple. Surely, those who share your view perpetuate your crime against Heaven.

“You kill prophets and resent those who try to warn you. How I have longed to embrace and protect you like a hen that gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would have no part of it! Look, you can have this house. It’s empty. I am leaving, and you will not see me again until you are willing to say, ‘Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord.’”

As they walked out of the Temple, Jesus’ disciples took note of the spectacular buildings that composed the Temple mount. “Not one stone you see will be left standing on another,” he commented.

Christ, in his last public speech, denounced the Pharisees and their teachers of the law and gave the reasons why judgment must fall on them and their Pharisaic system. He pronounced woe on them because they shut the kingdom of Heaven in men’s faces. He offered Himself as the way to the kingdom. By rejecting him, the Pharisees were closing the one door by which people could come into the kingdom.

The Poor Woman’s Gift (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4)

Then Jesus went over to the collection boxes in the Temple and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. The rich put in large amounts. Then a poor widow came and dropped two pennies. He called his disciples to him and remarked, “She has given more than all those rich men put together! They gave a little of their wealth while she gave her last penny.”

The widow’s trust was in God. A man’s gift is determined not by the amount he gives, but by the amount he has left after he gives.

The Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:1-3)

When they arrived at the olive orchard at the edge of the city, some of his disciples asked what was going to happen and when it was going to take place.

“Listen, or you will be deceived,” Jesus warned them. “Many will propose that salvation is at hand professing to speak on my behalf, but don’t listen to them. Don’t be alarmed when you hear of wars and natural catastrophes. These will come and go, but they do not necessarily signify the end of the world. Nations rise up, and kingdoms will be at war with each other. Earthquakes, famines, and pestilence persist all over the globe. These are sources of grief, but don’t be lured into thinking they mark the end of time.

“You could be arrested and condemned. The world may seem to rise against you because you are aligned with me. Friends and family will be maligned and betray each other and become enemies. Don’t worry about what you will say on your own behalf. Stay true and hold your course. My Spirit will intercede to make your testimony irrefutable. False prophets will arise and deceive many. Injustice will abound, and many will grow insensitive. But he that perseveres will be saved. The good news of the spiritual kingdom will be proclaimed all over the world as a testimony to every nation and clan. Eventually, the end will come.

“When you see the horrible thing spoken about by Daniel standing in the holy place, let those in Judea flee to the mountains. Don’t bother packing a suitcase or gathering your possessions. Pity those who are pregnant or have infants. Pray it doesn’t happen in winter or on a worship day because there will be unprecedented tribulation of which is unparalleled in all of history. If this

era continues, it will mark the end of mankind, but for the sake of God's elect, those days will draw to an end. Many will die, others will be captured, and Gentiles will destroy Jerusalem until their occupation has run its course.

"If anyone tells you he has seen the Christ, don't believe him. There will be many false saviors who will be very persuasive. Don't let them lure you out to the desert or some secret meeting place. As lightning flashes across the sky, my coming will be obvious to everyone.

"By the time this tribulation has passed, the sun, moon, and stars will no longer be visible, and constellations will not be discernable. The Earth will groan in distress. Then my sign will appear in the sky, and every nation on Earth will grieve when they realize that I am coming through the clouds with power and glory. I will gather the elect from every direction throughout this universe and beyond. You will observe it and realize that your redemption is at hand.

"When the tender branch of the fig tree bears leaves, you know that summer is near. When you see all these things, you can know that the time is close. Heaven and Earth will pass away, but what I have said will stand the test of time. No one knows exactly when except my Father, not even the angels.

"As it was in Noah's time, so it will be for my coming. People were eating and drinking, marrying, and conducting business until Noah entered the ark. They were unaware until the flood came and were swept away. So shall my coming be. Two will be in the field, one prepared for it, and the other won't. Two women will be grinding at the mill, one ready and the other not. Be alert. You don't know when the Lord might come. But know this. If the man had known when the thief was coming to break into his home, he would have stayed up and prevented the burglary. You must be ready, too. Don't be so preoccupied with the cares of this life that you are inattentive. I will confront you at a time when you least expect it."

The Olivet discourse is interpreted differently by learned scholars and theologians. Each of us should not be dogmatic as to how we understand the end times, but always be prepared for the end, no matter how it comes.