

Introduction

Sometimes the clearest grasp of something good comes against the backdrop of something dark. You see a diamond sparkle the brightest when it is placed under a light on a backdrop of black velvet. And what I want you to see this morning is that against the backdrop of judgment there is the glimmer of a precious assurance for all who will abide in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Read Text and Pray]

The Pharisees hated Jesus. They saw him as a threat to their reputation and their position of esteem among the Jews. Leading up to where we are today, we have seen the severity of Jesus in denouncing the Pharisees for their hypocrisy and thereby turning people away from the kingdom of heaven. We emphasized last week "the other Jesus"—the one who speaks harshly, but what we see this morning demonstrates that even when Jesus must be harsh, it is not sadistic. He does not take pleasure in the denunciation of the evil Pharisees. Nevertheless, he pronounces the judgment that must be pronounced. The main point of this message this morning is that there is bad news and good news in Jesus' lament over Jerusalem. While we hear a really sobering warning being spoken in this text, it is not all bad news. In fact I especially want you to hear the good news that is nestled in Jesus's lament. It starts with taking notice of...

I. The Heart of Him Who Holds Out the Shelter of His Wings.

Jesus reveals his heart even as he speaks these words of denunciation and judgment. In fact it is often in the context of justice that you learn a person's heart. Bad as I hate to admit it, I heard it in my father's voice years and years ago when he said those words no child wants to hear. I am talking about the words, "this is going to hurt me a whole lot more than it is going to hurt you." Until I was a parent I had a hard time believing it. But when I had to discipline my children, it hurt me deeply. I did not enjoy the application of pain to them, but it was necessary.

Before we focus on Jesus' words here I want to take you back to the Old Testament. I want to take you back to the days of King David. As the years of his reign as king wore on, he faced various challenges. One of the greatest came from David's son Absalom who conspired to take the throne from his father. He assembled an army and David fled out of Jerusalem. In the ensuing days, a battle took place between those who had joined Absalom and those who remained faithful to King David. In spite of Absalom's treachery, David had urged his faithful supporters to deal gently with the young man Absalom. But it was not to be. As Absalom's forces were overcome, he fled on the back of a donkey. Absalom's long hair was his undoing. It was caught in the branches of an oak tree and there he was suspended in the air unable to free himself. David's secretary of defense, his chief army commander, Joab and his men struck Absalom with javelins and put him to death.

A messenger was sent by Joab to share the news with King David. He announced, "Good news for my lord the king! For the Lord has delivered you this day from the hand of all who rose up against you." The king said to [him], "Is it well with the young man Absalom?" And [he] answered, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against you for evil be like that young man." And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

David's son had murdered his brother Amnon and fled from Jerusalem. Now Absalom had sought to undermine David's throne. He was guilty of murder and now treason. He had risen up in battle against David. When Joab thrust his spear into the young man, justice was served. But that couldn't keep David from being grieved. Still, Absalom was his son and his heart was broken.

Do you not hear some of the same sense when Jesus laments over the horror to come upon the people of Jerusalem? In verse 37, Jesus mourns, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!" You hear in this lament not a laugh of scoffing but a broken heart. Justice must fall but it falls with sorrow for a people he loves. You hear a similar note in the Apostle Paul in the epistle to the Romans. He experienced the very hostility about which Jesus spoke here. Paul came preaching to the Jews in the synagogues, but he was despised and even stoned there in Lystra and left outside the city for dead. He speaks of Israel's waywardness but says, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer for them is that they may be saved." Similarly, Jesus was tender even toward the children of Jerusalem even as he announced God's coming judgment on the city and upon its people.

It tells you something about the heart of Jesus. It is what the Lord spoke through Ezekiel: "As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?" It is important for everyone to know that God is not a sadist. He is holy and he must punish sin, but he has a heart toward humankind. He has the yearning to gather under his wings those who are willing. It is intense and it is prolonged. HOW OFTEN I would have gathered your children!

It is not the disposition of God to shut out anyone who would come to him. Jesus said in John 6:37, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out." Listen, God is holy and God is just, and he will by no means pardon those who will not turn from their sin. But God has provided salvation for human beings, and those who truly desire this salvation will not be turned away. He has the heart of mercy. Jesus depicts himself as ready and desiring to welcome any and all who are willing to be gathered under his wings.

Sinner, you who are far from God, do you wonder whether God would receive you to himself if you were to repent and draw near with faith in Jesus? Be assured that he holds forth himself as one who joyously forgives sinners who are willing to confess their sin and repent of that sin and take refuge in Jesus. Jesus offers himself as one who delights to be a mother hen to those who will take refuge in him. He grievously laments that there are those who stubbornly refuse to come to him. Justice will fall, but not without the falling of tears.

And every follower of Christ needs to soak in this image as well. We need to hear the emotion and the pathos of Jesus in his words, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem." One reason is we need to have that same pathos. It is not fitting or godly for us to sneer arrogantly at a sinful world no matter how wicked it may become. We must never delight in that in which God does not delight. It is maybe easier to feel a sorrow that is mingled with a sense of justice when it comes to family members and friends who are without God, but what about those who scoff and those who despise us for following Christ? Well, keep in mind that Jesus spoke these words as he was looking his worst enemies, the Pharisees, in the face.

But there is another reason we need to grasp this kind and merciful demeanor of Jesus. It is because there are times when we fall and fall badly into sin and fall again. Perhaps it is a fall that is in keeping with a long-standing pattern of sin in our lives and our path out of the pattern is quite slow. It is as though we have tripped as we are running the race. We find ourselves down on the ground of the track and we begin to wonder if Jesus would have us back. Why should he when we sin like this, and do so again? That is the question we hear echoing in our minds.

Perhaps we begin to question whether we are even truly a Christian at all, whether we are really one of his elect. Sometimes it may be appropriate to ask such a question, but what we should never question is the heart and desire of Jesus. What is his will according to Matthew 23:37? His disposition is to gather folks under his wings. What is the deterrent to such gathering? It is THEIR WILL. How often would I have gathered your children together . . . and YOU were NOT WILLING. The question for you is never, "Will Christ receive me if I come to him again?" The question is, "Are you willing to be gathered unto him?"

Weak and wounded sinner, beloved one, you are not good enough. You never were and you never will be. But Jesus is kind enough and merciful enough. The writer of Hebrews correctly declares, "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then WITH CONFIDENCE draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." There is never a time we are in that kind of need more truly than when we are tempted to despair because of our sin. The question is not "Will he receive me?" or "Am I too far gone?" Psalm 51 tells us that "a broken and contrite spirit, [he] WILL NOT DESPISE." The question is, "Will you get up and run to him whose delight is to gather you under his wings?" That is the heart of him who holds out his wings for you to shelter in. Run, run to him and take shelter.

II. The Peril of Rejecting the Shelter of His Wings.

The problem with the children of Jerusalem is that they would not take the shelter that Jesus offered. They rejected him as Messiah and therefore they rejected his protection. They were vulnerable then to the consequences of their rejection. Jesus would have gathered the children of Jerusalem under his wings but they were unwilling. They were stubborn. They were hard hearted. They were obstinate.

A great promise was issued to the people in the Old Testament in 2 Chronicles 7:14. "If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land." But that promise is conditional. IF, then. But over and over God's people rejected God's calls to repentance. They hated the messengers God sent to call them. They never liked the word that God sent to them. Remember, for example, when the 12 spies went into the promised land. They brought back a report of all the good things in the land. But they also reported that the people of the land were strong and the cities large and fortified. Taking the land seemed like more than they could accomplish. The Israelites rejected the idea of taking the land; they determined to replace Moses with a new leader and go back to Egypt. They picked up stones intending to kill Joshua and Caleb who were exhorting them to trust the Lord. Then the Lord judged the people and told them no one but Caleb from the previous generation would enter the promised land. He then told the people to turn back into the wilderness. But at that point, they decided they WOULD go up and take the land. And they were defeated. Whatever way the Lord wanted to lead the people, they said, "No."

God called Isaiah, years and years later to go and speak to the rebellious people. He indicated that as Isaiah went, the people would hear but not understand. They would see but not perceive. Their hearts were dull and they would persist in rebellion until the whole nation was a waste and the people went away into exile. When Jeremiah came along and spoke the word of the Lord to the people, they just would not listen; they would not believe. And they suffered great consequences.

Such is the history of the children of Jerusalem. As Jesus indicates here, Jerusalem was the city that (present tense) kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! It is all present tense; they haven't changed. They are still doing what they always have done. Resisting God's word is never more evident than at this very moment when they are resisting God's own Son and their own Messiah. He would gather them under his wings but they say, "NO!" And so they will face great peril.

Jesus declares, "See your house is left to you desolate." What house is he talking about? He seems to be speaking of the temple. That is where he was when all this was spoken. But strikingly, when Jesus had entered this temple the day before, he cleared out the merchants and money changers and called the temple his Father's house. Now he is calling their house. They have stolen it and God is relinquishing it to them. And it will be left desolate. The details emerge in Matthew 24:1-2. The disciples are pointing out the impressive buildings of the temple and Jesus says to them, it is all coming down. He said, Look around at what you see; "Truly I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down."

And the desolation of the house is indicative of the entire nation as a whole. He started his lament by designating Jerusalem. Here is the city and its temple and its people who were chosen by God. They were blessed more than any other people by God. But they would not come under his wings. And the consequences are grave. Jesus is withdrawing from them. "I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord." He is abandoning them until he returns and all recognize him even if by coercion as Messiah. He then turned and left the temple and went away. He never went back. And he won't be back until he comes as the conqueror and time is up.

In AD 70, the Romans brought Jerusalem and its Temple to the ground. Not one stone was left upon another. Today at that very spot stands a Muslim mosque. Why have the Jews suffered so greatly throughout the years since? From them comes the holy scriptures, the words of the prophets, and the messiah himself. Why are they left so desolate? Because they would not gather themselves together under the wings of Jesus! It will be the same for everyone who will not bend the knee to Christ Jesus and take refuge in him. There is no other refuge, no other fortress, no other name. There is no other. This is peril unspeakable for all who will not gather under the shelter of his wings. Why will you not come to Jesus? Why will you resist? He is just and he will judge, but his call to come is a call of mercy. The one true God calls. He summons to the ends of the earth. Come you sinners, poor and needy, weak and wounded, sick and sore, Jesus ready stands to save you, full of pity, love, and power.

III. The Blessing of Taking Shelter Under His Wings.

Jesus provides a graphic picture here of his provision for all who will shelter themselves under his protection. He says, "I would have gathered your children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings." This is a picture that has not been lost through the years. Even today mother hens gather their chicks under their wings to protect them from danger. Go to you tube and see. It is sweet and

precious—the loving and tender care a mother hen exercises as she spreads her pinions over her chicks. It is quite startling to me the determined defense a mother hen to protect her brood.

Listen, there is no desolation like the desolation of a departed Jesus. But there is no protection and provision that can compare to the shelter of the wings of Jesus. Psalm 36:7 is where we find these words of David: "How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light."

For many, Psalm 91 has become a comfort and delight. Listen.

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty; I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust." For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from deadly pestilence. He will cover you WITH HIS PINIONS, and UNDER HIS WINGS you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler: You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked. Because you have made the LORD your dwelling place . . . no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.

The Lord speaks in Psalm 91 of those who take refuge under his wings:

Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation.

To imagine taking shelter as a young chick under the wings of your hen mother, it means comfort, security, warmth. It means she exposes herself to danger in order to protect you. And that is precisely what Christ has done by coming to be one of us and bearing our sin burden on the cross. To take refuge in him is first and foremost to draw near to him in faith and trust, to believe in him as our shield from the wrath of God which we deserve for our sins. Imagine a hawk flying overhead. The mother hen chirps for her chicks to come near and they gather under her wings. This is what Jesus is doing as he calls us to himself and faces God's wrath. This is our greatest enemy. As we gather under the shelter of his wings, the punishment due us falls on him. He dies but rises again and his resurrected wings still are spread over us!

But if he gathers us there to protect us from the consequences of our own sin, will he not also protect us from anything and everything that could truly do us harm? Is that not what Psalm 91 communicates? We will be in the midst of trouble but it will not touch us! We may face danger. We might get cancer or some other deadly disease. We may be made to swim in the seas of deep, deep grief. Storms of life will certainly seep across the plains of our lives. We may possess little or we may possess much. We might experience meanness and hostility from others. Eventually we will all face death. But the wings of the Lord will not allow you to be endangered if that is where you are.

Now you have to have an eternal outlook for this to make sense. But that is what the Bible has. It looks beyond the short term to the long-term. Under his wings all things work together for good because under his wings, his design is for us to become like him. And his design is to bring us home to be with him where although he left the temple and the children of Jerusalem, he will NEVER leave those who take refuge in the shelter of his wings.

Conclusion

How do you do that? HOW do you take refuge under the wings of Jesus? It begins with repentance and faith and it continues that way. Repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ. Walk with him; live for him; run the race looking unto Jesus and you are under his wings. And there, nothing can be your ultimate undoing!

Prayer**Benediction**

May you hold fast in love to Christ and Christ himself assures you his wings will shield you from wrath and shelter you in every storm for the glory of His name.