

Introduction

The citizens of Gerasa had a problem. How on earth could they prepare for a visit from the most powerful man on earth? Their city on the east side of the Jordan river was one of the cities of the Decapolis

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And they had a big problem in the year 129 AD; the Emperor Hadrian

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(the same guy that ordered the construction of Hadrian's wall in England to keep out the pesky Scots)

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had announced that he was going to pay a state visit to their city. How could they honor him in such a way that he would remember their city and be kind to them? So they hit on the perfect solution; they built a new gateway into the city outside the city limits just for his visit.

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We can imagine the pomp and circumstance as Hadrian arrived on his horse or in his chariot, the city officials going out to greet him, and the cheering crowds as he rode down the main street (led in this case by an arm-waving American tourist)

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towards the theater

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where he no doubt had to suffer through lengthy speeches of welcome!

I do not know if their strategy worked, but we do know that the city never expanded as far as the new gateway, so I am thinking that the strategy failed.

Today visiting royalty still get the red carpet treatment

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and although this does not include a new gateway, it can include a visit with the President, even if it is under a portrait of George Washington☺

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But what about a visit from God himself? How would the people of Jerusalem welcome their king and their Messiah? And how would the King react as he arrived in his royal city? And what sort of king was he anyway? To find out we turn to Luke 19:28-44.

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After Jesus had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it.'"

Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

They replied, "The Lord needs it."

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They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

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As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "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."

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We come this Palm Sunday to the beginning of what many churches call Holy Week; the week that begins with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and continues with Jesus' arrest and trial and crucifixion, and then ends gloriously on Resurrection Sunday, when Jesus burst the bonds of death and began his reign as Lord and Saviour. So what can we learn from this story of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his weeping over the city?

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1. Jesus is a humble king who was rejected by his subjects.

Today's reading shows our Lord entering as king into his own royal city. He was king by virtue of his position as the Son of God, his appointment by God, and his descent as a son of David. But he was also a humble king, coming into his city on an ass

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not on a warhorse such as Hadrian would have used.

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And he was also a king who was rejected by some of his key subjects, the leaders of his city. Yes, the people lining the road into Jerusalem cried out "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" But they were his disciples, and they had no power or influence in the city. The real power lay with the Jewish leaders and the Roman troops stationed in the city. They were the ones who had the religious power and authority in Jerusalem and therefore in the whole nation. Yes, Herod was the nominal king, but he was a Roman puppet. In religious as well as many civil matters the Jerusalem-based Great Sanhedrin dominated the nation. It was a council of 71 members, consisting of both Pharisees and Sadducees, the two major religious parties of the time, and it functioned as the Supreme Court of the Jewish nation. And they were not impressed with Jesus; in fact exactly the reverse. Their minds were made up; this Galilean peasant was an imposter, but a dangerous one. So some of the Pharisees who had condescended to take note of Jesus' arrival had nothing but scorn: "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" they shouted. And so there was a division between Jesus disciples and the rulers of the nation. Jesus' entry was an occasion of **triumph but also of tragedy**. It was a triumph for Jesus and his disciples, but it was a tragedy for those who rejected him. Let us look into this story to see what we can learn about our Lord and about the tragic effects of spiritual blindness. We will focus our attention on verses 41-44:

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As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "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."

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2. Jesus is a king who knows the future.

These verses are only found in Luke's gospel, and the first thing they tell us is that *Jesus knew the future*. He could see in his mind's eye the Jewish revolt of 70 AD, only about 40 years after his entry into Jerusalem. He could see the four legions of Roman soldiers camped around Jerusalem, led by the future emperor Titus. He could see its inhabitants making their last desperate attempt to fend off the might of Rome. He could see the wall of wooden stakes surrounding the city, and the brave Jewish zealots who crept out and burned it down. He could see the embankment that the Romans built to replace the wooden palisade. Now none of the inhabitants, nor the pilgrims who had come into the city for the Passover, could escape, and no reinforcements or supplies could get in. Jewish resistance fighters who were captured were nailed by the Romans to crosses which were set up on the banks around the city, in order to terrify the Jews into surrender. Jesus could see this and he could see as the Roman legions finally broke into the city after a siege of six months, and the destruction that they wrought in the city.

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The historian Josephus recorded "The slaughter within was even more dreadful than the spectacle from without. Men and women, old and young, insurgents and priests, those who fought and those who entreated mercy, were hewn down in indiscriminate carnage. The number of the slain exceeded that of the slayers. The legionaries had to clamber over heaps of dead to carry on the work of extermination." And Jesus could see as every building in Jerusalem was torn down, as the glorious temple was burned to the ground, as every tree was cut down, and as the whole city was reduced to a smoldering ruin.

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And Jesus could see this and understood its inevitability. Now to most of us that does not come as big surprise; we know that Jesus is God, so it's a no-brainer that he knew the future. But that is just the point; if we reverse the logic, we can say that because Jesus knew the future so clearly, this is then strong evidence that he was who he claimed to be; the Son of God. So if you are here this morning as someone who does not yet believe in the fact of Jesus' divinity, but who is open to the evidence, let me suggest to you that this prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem is just one more piece of evidence that Jesus was not just a good teacher, not even just a prophet, but was in fact "very God of very God" as the Nicene creed states. And of course there is much more evidence of this truth, supremely revealed in Jesus resurrection from the dead, as we will celebrate next Sunday.

But there is one more thing we can note from this, which is a great encouragement to me and to all of us. It is that not only did Jesus know the future of Jerusalem, he also knew the future of his disciples. During the last supper on Thursday evening Jesus told Peter that he would deny him three times, and that prophecy came true the next morning as Peter did just that. But Jesus still loved Peter in spite of his betrayal, and restored him to fruitful ministry. And so we can be assured that Jesus knows our future too. For us the future is mercifully concealed, but for Jesus it is an open book. Nothing that happens to us takes him by surprise, and whether our future is easy or hard, we can be assured that he is with us and loves us and cares for us, until that day when we pass from this life into his presence and hear the words "Well done, good and faithful servant".

So Christian friends, rejoice that your future is in Jesus's hands; he knows you and he loves you and you can trust him with your todays and your tomorrows. As the Apostle Paul writes to the Romans

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Rom 8:35, 38-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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3. Jesus is a king who knew the willful rejection of the Jewish leaders.

This passage in Luke is not the only place where Jesus shows his concern over Jerusalem. Similar prophetic words are also recorded by both Matthew and Luke (Luke 13:34-35); here is Matthew's version:

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Matt 23:37-39

"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.'"

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Luke 19:41-44

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "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.*"

In these two passages Jesus is not of course speaking of the physical city of Jerusalem, but of the leadership of the city by the Sanhedrin; the scribes and the Pharisees and the Sadducees who had clearly and decisively

turned their backs on Jesus and had rejected him. What he is condemning is deliberate and conscious rejection of the truth. So in Mathew 23:37-38 he says “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 And in Luke 19 They will not leave one stone on another, *because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.*”

So how did all this happen? We read in the gospels time and again of the Jewish leaders’ rejection of Jesus. As a key example, they ascribed his miracles of healing to the power of the devil:

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Luke 11:14-15

Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. But some of them said, "By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." But Jesus pointed out the wrongness of this argument when he said

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Luke 11:20

But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

And in Mark’s gospel Jesus says that this deliberate rejection of the plain truth is the serious sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit

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Mark 3:28-30

I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin."

He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."

The Jewish leaders then plotted and planned to get rid of him so that they could maintain their own power. In Matthew’s gospel

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Matt. 26:59-60

The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death.

Do you see the force of these words? Here is the supreme council of God’s chosen people, the Jews, looking for false evidence to accomplish their desire end of getting rid of Jesus.

In effect the Jewish leaders were saying the same thing as Satan in Milton’s Paradise Lost

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So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,

Farewell remorse; all good to me is lost.

Evil, be thou my good.

Paradise Lost. Book iv. Line 108.

But now we come to one of the most amazing statements about our Lord Jesus. As he looked out over the city of Jerusalem, he knew that he was going to his death at the hands of the very leaders who had rejected him. And yet, as he contemplated its coming destruction at the hands of the Romans, he wept. And so we learn

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4. Jesus is a king who loves even those who hate him

This is the most amazing truth of all. Here is our Lord going into the city ruled by his enemies, knowing full well that they hate him and are plotting his death, and yet, amazingly, he weeps for them:

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Luke 41-42, 44

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "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 not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you.”

Why did Jesus weep? Because he loved his people, even those who hated him. I think his sorrow had two parts to it.

In the first place, he grieved because of all the suffering that he foresaw; the hunger and starvation, the desperate and usually fatal attempts to flee from the city, and finally the overthrow of the city and the slaughter of the hundreds of thousands of people in the city. Jesus saw this and he wept.

But secondly he wept because of the sin that prevented the Jewish leaders from seeing the truth that was staring them in the face. Some of them had actually seen Jesus heal people, and all of them had heard of his miracles. And after Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, many people came to see Jesus and Lazarus

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John 12:9-11

Meanwhile a large crowd of Jews ... came ... to see Lazarus, whom he (Jesus) had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for on account of him many of the Jews were going over to Jesus and putting their faith in him.

The Jewish leaders hated Jesus so much that they were willing to kill an innocent man to stop people from following him!

And yet Jesus wept for these men; in spite of their hatred of him and their deliberate rejection of the truth, Jesus still loved them and was deeply grieved for their fate, because the destruction of a city and the loss of life is not the end but only the beginning of judgment. No one in the Bible warned of hell as often or as vividly as Jesus did. And one of those warnings came to Jerusalem a few days after the triumphal entry. Jesus says to the Pharisees Matt 23:33-36

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"You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth... I tell you the truth, all this will come upon this generation.

So Jesus warned but he also wept; he condemned the sin but he loved the sinner.

5. Jesus is a king who offered himself for us.

Only four days after Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as a humble and loving king, he was arrested, tried, and the next day condemned to death and killed by the barbarous Roman method of execution by crucifixion. And why did he allow this? Why did he not call on the 20 legions of angels at his disposal? Because he loved you and me, and because his death was the only way that he could provide a way for God's wrath against sin to fall on him instead of on us; the only way that we might be turned from enemies under God's judgment of hell to children of a loving Father. So let me conclude by asking some questions; questions that apply to me and to you.

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1. To all of you who are believers in Jesus as your Saviour.
 - a. Have you thanked him recently (like today) for dying for you?
 - b. Do you understand and believe that he knows your future, and nothing that happens, good or bad, can separate you from his love?
Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - c. Are we concerned about even our friends as Jesus was his enemies? Jesus wept over the fate of his enemies, because he knew they were going to hell. Bob Pierce, Founder of World Vision Organization, famously said "Let my heart be broken by the things that break the heart of God" Are we willing to pray this prayer? Are you? Am I? Are we deliberately seeking to share the gospel with our friends and neighbors? We all have a wonderful opportunity to invite our friends and neighbors to the Resurrection Sunday services next week, where they will hear the gospel and may well be receptive to conversation about Jesus and his claims on their lives. Will you invite someone to come with you next Sunday?

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2. To any of you who have not yet committed your lives to Jesus

- a. Do you understand that you are rejecting Jesus just as much as the Jewish leaders? You may say “But I am not trying to kill him, as they were. I do not speak openly against him; in fact I respect him as a good moral teacher, just not as the Son of God.” But Jesus not just a great moral teacher; is the king, and he demands your total obedience; without that he counts you as an enemy.
- b. Do you realize that Jesus, in his love for you, is weeping over you? Just as he wept over Jerusalem, so he weeps over every lost soul that is exiled to hell's eternity. He weeps that people continue to be ignorant of what makes for peace. He weeps that people still do not recognize the time of God's coming.
- c. Does Christ have to weep over any of us like He wept over Jerusalem?

Conclusion

How would we prepare if we knew that God Himself as going to ride into Blacksburg tomorrow? And this is going to happen one day, although it will not just be Blacksburg or New York or London or Moscow; He will come in such a way that the whole world knows it. Will you be among those who welcome Him with joy, or among those who call on the rocks to hide them?