

The Climax of God's Revelation

Matthew 23:34-39

Halifax: 12 November 2006

Introduction

Over the last couple of weeks, we have been looking at Jesus scathing words of reproof against the scribes and Pharisees of His generation.

- He has repeatedly called them all sorts of names...
 - hypocrites,
 - blind guides,
 - sons of Hell,
 - fools,
 - serpents,
 - and a brood of vipers.

- He has exposed their pride and their vain glory,
 - and He has blasted them for their twisting of scripture, their inward corruption, and their pretence that they would have treated the prophets of old with respect if they had lived in those days.

You can be sure that our Lord's searing words made quite an impression!

- These esteemed rulers were not used to being spoken to like this!
- They were held in honour and reverence by the people.
 - They were accustomed to titles and greetings and honourable seats, not to harsh rebukes and warnings!

Why was Jesus so severe with these men?

- It was because these men were the official guardians and expounders of the truth that God had made known to His people...
 - It was their task to guide God's people in the way of truth!
 - And they happened to live in the day when the full revelation of God's grace had reached its highest pitch, its apex, its climax, its zenith!
 - It was **the day** when the truth of God's mercy was finally and fully revealed.

- But instead of rejoicing (and leading the people to rejoice) in this glorious climax of God's revelation of grace,
 - These men were doing all they could to prevent that revelation from going forth!
 - They used their position as those appointed to guard the truth and expound the truth to rather suppress the truth.

- Because the revelation of grace was so great, their wickedness in rejecting it was all the more manifest.
- This morning we are going to look at these things.
 - First, I want to show you how it was in the generation to which Jesus spoke that the revelation of God's grace reached its zenith...
 - And then I want to show you how, at the same time, the manifestation of man's wickedness reached its zenith.
 - In other words, if we want to learn about God's grace, we must look at this generation (to which Jesus spoke)...
 - And if we want to look about man's wickedness, we must also look at this generation.

I. First, see how the revelation of God's grace reached its zenith in the generation of our Lord Jesus.

- Jesus has just been telling the scribes and Pharisees that they are just like their ancestors (referred to as their fathers) who persecuted the prophets...
 - They claimed that if the prophets had come in their days, they would not have joined in the persecutions,
 - But Jesus tells them that they will very soon prove otherwise...
 - He is going to send prophets and wise men and scribes very soon,
 - and they will persecute them just as their fathers persecuted the prophets of their days.
 - You can see this is verse 34.

A. Now brothers and sisters, I want you to consider who these prophets and wise men and scribes are!

1. By calling them "prophets, wise men, and scribes,"
 - a. Jesus is using the terms that these men were familiar with for those who minister God's word,
 - and by including the term "prophet," he includes those who are given their message directly by God—under divine inspiration.
 - They will also be men who live the word by example (wise men) and men who write God's word (scribes).
 - b. Jesus is speaking, of course, of the apostles and prophets that He is very shortly to send forth to preach the gospel after His death and resurrection.
 - He is talking about men like Peter, James, and John...
 - "Apostle" means "sent one,"

- and you will notice that Jesus is saying that He Himself is going to send these men to minister to the present generation...
- Jesus was going to send them forth very soon, and then everyone could see how the scribes and Pharisees would treat them.

TRANS> But before we move on to that,

- I want you to consider how great the task of these prophets, wise men and scribes that Jesus sends was going to be.
2. To them was given the task of telling Israel and then the entire world about the life and work of Jesus Christ...
 - a. They were to tell the facts about Him...
 - 1) They were to explain that He was the very Son of God who took to Himself human flesh...
 - 2) They were to tell about his time on earth, how He healed people and how He calmed the stormy sea, how He fed the five thousand and how He taught with great authority.
 - 3) They were to give an accurate record of the things they had heard him teach...
 - 4) And they were to tell the whole world how He suffered, died, and was buried; how He rose from the dead on the third day, and how He ascended into heaven and poured out the Holy Spirit on His own.

TRANS> In writing passing this information along and putting it to writing,

- they would be the link between the life of Christ and the whole world!
- They would give us the New Testament so we might know all we need to know about the Son of God!
 - But they were also to do more than just give the facts of His life...
- b. They were also to give the divine meaning and purpose of His life and work...
 - They were to explain that He died on the cross to atone for the sins of the world...
 - And that His resurrection was God's declaration that His sacrifice of Himself was fully accepted for those sins...
 - And they were to proclaim, in His name, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.
 - They were to send forth the call of God to all men to repent and believe the gospel...
 - Not that they would personally carry it to all men, but they would set it forth as the divine message for all future generations...

- For all gospel preachers whom God would raise up to proclaim.

TRANS> It was the task of the prophets and apostles of Jesus' generation to make these glorious things known not only to their own generation, but for every generation to come...

- They were God's official spokesman to set down for all ages the salvation that God had sent to the world through His Son!

B. Truly this was the grand finale of all revelation!

1. The epistle to the Hebrews describes it as such when it declares:

- Hebrews 1:1-3: God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

a. God had many ways of speaking before Christ came...

- Just after the fall, He revealed His saving mercy to Adam,
 - clothing him with animal skins and promising to send the seed of the woman who would crush the serpent's (Satan's) head so that men would serve God.

b. And God clarified this revelation through the ages...

- by His mighty acts such as the flood, such as redeeming Israel out of Egypt, such as giving them the tabernacle and its service...
- And by His word through prophets like Moses and Jeremiah and man others.
- But this revelation was not complete until Jesus Christ came into the world and actually accomplished God's redemptive work...
 - and then sent forth His apostles to fully declare it and explain it.

c. This last point is important—

- Revelation of God's grace was not yet complete after Jesus died and rose...
 - The work was complete, but we had no way of understanding it or accessing it unless the LORD sent forth His apostles to declare it to us.
 - We would have had an interesting story of Jesus life and death and resurrection,
 - but we would have no way of knowing that all this was done in order that we might be reconciled to God, forgiven all our sins, and given the gift of eternal life through faith in Him.

- These apostles and prophets, are, in other words, an essential part of the full revelation of God's grace.
- Christ is the final word of God to us—He is the one who fully accomplishes our salvation—
 - but part of that revelation involves the ministry of those He sent forth in His own generation to declare what He had done.
 - Without them, we do not have the revelation we need to be saved.
- As the apostle John put it in his first epistle,
 - “What we have seen and heard (concerning Christ) we declare to you that you also may have fellowship with us, and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ...”

TRANS> And so as the revelation of Jesus Christ is the grand finale of God's revelation,

2. It is also the centre of all history!
 - a. We are right to date our calendars according to Christ—
 - This is 2006 in the year of our Lord!
 - *Anno Domini!*
 - b. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the gospel for all ages.
 - It was to Him that all the righteous of the Old Testament waited and looked forward...
 - And it is to Him that all the righteous of the New Testament era look back with rejoicing and rest in His finished work for their salvation.
 - There is no other name given among men by which we must be saved.
 - c. He, coming to Jerusalem at the turn of the ages is the last word concerning God's salvation forever!
 - It is all so very historical because the transcendent Lord of creation stepped into our time and space world to redeem us.
 - This is why we ought to reject the idea that God would have some additional revelation today...
 - Revelation reached its goal in Jesus Christ!
 - After His life was once presented and His work interpreted by His own apostles in His generation,
 - revelation ceased.

- We are not thereby deprived, but most privileged in our day...
- While revelation was still going forth, the world was without a complete picture of God's saving mercies...
- But now we have the full message, the full gospel of God's love.
 - How we ought to cherish it!

TRANS> And now brothers and sisters, I want you to see what this revelation is to us...

C. It is a call to come to Jesus Christ for full and free salvation!

1. In verse 37 we have the lament of Jesus concerning Jerusalem...

a. All through the ages He had called them...

- All through the ages He had sent His prophets to call them to look to Him for salvation...
- Matthew 23:37: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."

b. Peter tells us that the prophets of old spoke by the Spirit of Jesus Christ...

- When they pled with God's people to come and receive the grace of God, they were speaking for Jesus.
- And Jesus is saying that every time the message went forth,
 - He had wanted to gather the children of Jerusalem (the people of God) under His wings to shelter them and give them life and salvation.
 - But characteristically they had been unwilling...
 - Instead of receiving the good word of God, they had despised the prophets and murdered them.
 - Yet, He continued to plead...
 - "How often I wanted to gather you" He says.

2. And so it is today, now that He has come and completed His work.

a. Jesus has sent forth His prophets and wise men and scribes...

- And now He continues to send forth missionaries and ministers to preach His word.
- And every time He does, He desires to gather His people under His wings,
 - to save them from judgement and wrath...

- b. And now that we have the full revelation of His saving work, we know how great His zeal for our salvation really is!
 - We know that in order to shelter us from the judgement we deserve, that He Himself took all of that judgement upon Himself!
 - The lightening bolts of God's wrath fell on Him so that those who come under His wings would not be touched!
- c. The people of Old Testament times saw His tenderness in His calls to come and drink of His grace and mercy...
 - But we see it even more now that Jesus has come...
 - And this was the glorious message that was declared in all its fullness to Jesus' generation by the prophets and wise men and scribes that He sent—even to the wicked scribes and Pharisees that had crucified Him!
 - How they should have rejoiced in this glorious gospel as soon as they heard it!
 - Surely though they had repelled God's grace through the ages,
 - now that they were able to see the fullness of what He had done...
 - Surely now they would come and be gathered to Him for salvation under His wings!

TRANS> But instead of repenting of their obstinacy that had continually repelled the grace of God when the revelation of God's mercy reached its zenith in Jesus Christ...

- They manifested an even deeper obstinacy!
- In fact, we might say that when the revelation of God's grace reached its zenith in Jesus Christ,
 - the revelation of the wickedness of man reached its zenith in the scribes and Pharisees who resisted that grace with such vehemence!
 - This is the very point that Jesus is making in this passage...
 - The full revelation of God's grace brought out the worst in these men.
- So now, having seen the zenith of the revelation of God's grace in Jesus generation...

II. I want you to see the zenith of the revelation of man's wickedness...

A. Jesus tells these self-righteous scribes and Pharisees what they will do when He sends His prophets and wise men and scribes with the precious gospel of grace in its full glory...

1. He says,

- v. 34: “some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will persecute from city to city.”
2. Of course, this is exactly what happened.
- As soon as Peter and John come forth preaching the resurrection and confirming the words with miracles from heaven,
 - The Pharisees arrest them and scourge them and forbid them and imprison them.
 - Not long after this, the apostle James is murdered...
 - and in history we learn that many others of the apostles were also murdered.
 - We see murders and tortures and beatings and imprisonments, and we see them pursuing God’s servants from city to city, just as Jesus said they would.
3. These scribes and Pharisees **claimed** that they were not like their fathers...
- In v. 30 they said:
 - “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.
- a. This is very characteristic of fallen men!
- We flatter ourselves constantly and we do not admit the darkness and wickedness that is truly in our heart!
 - When we do evil, we claim that ours is a righteous cause...
 - We live in a day when human depravity is constantly denied and suppressed.
- b. But these men show us what happens when the highest revelation of God’s grace is brought to man!
- 1) When the very Son of God, crucified and raised again for sinners, is revealed,
 - Those who bring the revelation are killed and crucified and hotly pursued from city to city!
 - 2) Understand that this is what the whole fallen human race is like!
 - This is the wickedness that is in all of those who reject God’s Word in all ages...
 - Jesus is showing them that though they claimed to be different, they were just the same...

- As soon as real prophets with God's real message came to them, they would do the exact same thing their fathers had done.
- 3) But **you** need to see that you are made of the same stuff!
- a) Don't be like these boasting Pharisees who claimed that if we had been alive in their day,
- we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.
- b) Don't you see brothers and sisters?
- This is the very same wickedness that is in every person...
 - Oh yes, we know how to polish ourselves up to live in good reputation among our contemporaries—
 - the Pharisees themselves were very good at that...
 - They did not have a bad reputation among the people!
 - And we have all sorts of ways of hiding the real malice that is in our hearts—even by good works.
 - But our wickedness is that we (by nature) are so turned against our Creator and our God that we spurn His offers of grace and salvation when they are brought to us...
 - We are so wicked that we don't want to be reconciled to our God
 - even when He is willing and when He has made the way for us at the high price of His only begotten Son!
 - Nothing shows human obstinacy so much as the way we dodge and deny and avoid coming to Christ for salvation when He is clearly made known to us...
 - We should be running to Him with gladness, but instead we reject Him!
 - And our desire to reject Him is so great that we will even kill and persecute His messengers if necessary!
- c) Now you may very well say to me,
- "But I have not done such things! I have come to Jesus and I am rejoicing in Him. I am trusting in Him for my salvation."
 - Indeed, some of you have been trusting in Him from your youth...
 - So you will say,

- “Why do you say that this wickedness is in me? I am not like these Pharisees, am I?”
- Dear child of God,
 - You need to know that you are indeed just like these Pharisees apart from the electing grace of God.
 - Even though you should hear the gospel a thousand times, presented to you by the voice of angels, and impressed upon you with the deepest urgency and fullest clarity,
 - You would reject it a thousand and one times unless God breaks into your life to transform your soul.
 - The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God...
 - Do not swell with pride when you see these wicked Pharisees...
 - Realise that you are made of the very same stuff and it is only because of the grace of God that you have come to Christ—if indeed you have come!
 - Why do you think it was necessary for Jesus to die on the cross if this wickedness is not native to all men?
 - Why do you think that no one will come to Him unless the Spirit draws him?
 - And realise further that if you are not trusting in Jesus Christ,
 - you are spurning the same grace these men spurned!
 - You say, “Yes, but I would not kill...”
 - Don’t be so hasty to say that!
 - If it is in you to reject so great a salvation, it is in you to crucify the Lord Jesus...

B. Look at how Jesus regards all those who reject Him as acting in solidarity with each other when they persecute...

1. Look at verse 35 and 36...

- Matthew 23:35-36: “that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. "Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.”

- a. He regards them as participators in all the other persecutions of the righteous back to the very beginning...
 - 1) He considers the persecutions that will be carried out by His generation to be the very same wickedness that was found in Cain when he killed Abel and in Joash when he killed Zechariah—
 - Zechariah was the son of the priest Jehoiada, who had delivered Joash from Athaliah when she tried to kill him and had seen to it that he reigned on the throne.
 - 2) Jesus lumps all the persecuting actions of the ages as one and the same.
 - They are all part of one great campaign to resist reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ.
 - Our Lord sees all Christ rejecters as joining hands to work together—
 - They may not all have the same policy, but they are all determined to suppress the truth...
 - They use whatever policy seems to work to suppress the truth...
 - If arguments are effective, they will use arguments...
 - If intimidation, they will use intimidation...
 - If evasion or excuses will work, they will resort to these...
 - If false religion will do the job, they will resort to that.
 - But in those times when the call of God is so loud in their presence that only murder will work, they will murder.
 - That is why we learn what is really in the heart of Christ rejecters when revelation reaches its zenith.
 - 3) You need to understand something that is often not understood...
 - Namely, that the rejection of the grace of God (when it clearly made know to a person) is itself a far worse offense than murder...
 - it is a far greater display of malice and wickedness.
 - To refuse to come under the wings of Christ when graciously invited to do so—to refuse to be reconciled to God at God's expense...
 - it the very height of wickedness...
 - It is human sin at its most heinous expression.
 - This wickedness reached its highest expression when the apostles of Jesus for rejected **because** they were apostles.
- b. And so Jesus says that His judgement will fall on the present generation.

- That they will bear the guilt of all those who had gone before because by their actions in Jesus' day, they show themselves to be in full agreement and harmony with them...
 - There is a solidarity—they are just continuing the work that their wicked fathers began.
2. We must apply the principle to ourselves...
- a. Those who reject the grace of God today, affirm the work of those who crucified the Lord Jesus and His apostles...
 - They may claim that they would not kill...but if they were there, they would have killed...
 - b. The truth is,
 - when it comes down to it,
 - if you are a rejecter of the grace of God, you will do whatever it takes to resist it—even murder.
 - You see, rejecting the grace of God is, in fact, worse than murder.
 - Jesus generation shows us what those who are closest to His revelation will do when they are backed into a corner—
 - that is, when whatever resistance of God's grace they are putting forward is no longer tenable.
 - When their pretences of righteousness and their efforts to trap the Lord or discredit his servants fail...
 - They became desperate because they are so near to the truth and find it is breaking in on them and exposing what they really are.
 - They felt that they had to do something—so they persecute.
 - They resort to whatever method works.
- C. See what Jesus does to these grace-rejecters of His generation...
1. He tells them that their house is going to be desolate.
 - a. They are the ones to whom the word of God was brought,
 - they are the ones to whom the Messiah came near and who first heard the gospel...
 - But because this only brought out the worst in them,
 - They will no longer be the depository of God's revelation.
 - In other words,

- He is going to take His word away from them.
 - Their house will be, as Jesus says, desolate...
 - It will be like a desert, a barren wilderness.
 - Jesus will deposit His word elsewhere.
 - When Jesus takes away His prophets and His Spirit,
 - He in effect takes Himself away.
 - As they have despised His prophets and having His word near, He will leave them to themselves.
 - Other nations will become the carriers of His word and He will dwell in the midst of these other nations instead of in Israel as He had always done.
- b. Of course there is also the punitive aspect of His judgement—
- When He says all the blood that was shed will come upon this generation,
 - He is speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem—the terrible atrocities that He sent upon them 70 AD.
 - We will have more to say about this in future sermons,
 - about this terrible judgment that was the worst in Israel’s history—and that has certainly been the most enduring.
 - To this day, the word of truth has still not been restored to them.
- c. Jesus also tells them that they will see Him no more...
- For all those long ages since Abraham, He had dwelt in the midst of them, only forsaking them for a moment to chasten them...
 - but now that He has come to them in the flesh and died for them and they have still rejected Him,
 - He will depart from them...
 - It will be like it was at Shiloh when the ark was taken away...
 - Ichabod—the glory had departed...
 - The one who had so long dwelt in their midst would move along and leave them desolate.
 - They would be left without His word and Spirit—desolate.
2. Now I want you to understand that Jesus still operates the same way with us Gentiles...

- a. He graciously brings His word near to a nation and He sends ministers of the gospel to preach it faithfully to them...
 - And He calls us earnestly to come under His wings and receive His salvation.
 - And after a great deal of resistance, that nation comes to Him and begins to serve Him and enjoy His blessings...
 - But then they become proud and obstinate the way Israel did...
 - And for a long time, He keeps on calling, despite their obstinacy...
 - He keeps on and on for a long time...
 - You can see how long He has borne with our resistance in Canada.
 - Our wickedness has been very great, just like Israel's...
 - The gospel has come near in all its glorious fullness and we have known it—85% of our province is baptised!
 - But instead of rejoicing and welcoming the gospel, we have resisted it and are resisting it more and more.
 - We have refused to come under the wings of our Lord and we are getting more and more strong in that resistance.
 - And those who resist it the most are usually those who are nearest to it...
 - those who belong to the church or whose parents did...
 - And who have been exposed in their hypocrisy by the truth.
 - b. Eventually the day comes that He finally spurns a nation like ours for their ingratitude and takes His light away from them.
 - He turns them over to the walk in their own way and brings destruction to their society—
 - But the gospel is not lost...
 - He moves on to another nation that will bring forth fruit.
 - The gospel is making its way around the world—from one nation to another.
3. But I want you to consider what a terrible judgement it is to have the word of God taken from us.
 - a. It shuts us out of Christ's kingdom and takes away even the hope of eternal life.
 - Nothing worse could happen to a people!

- b. Yet, it is perfectly just for the LORD to do this when He has been so gracious to come to near to us and to condescend to us and we have spurned Him again and again.
 - To think that we should be so obstinate that we would refuse His gracious offer of salvation—
 - We are so contrary to Him that we won't even be reconciled when He is willing to bear all the punishment for us.
- c. Surely God is fully justified to do whatever He wants with us for such great wickedness...
 - We have absolutely no grounds for whining...
 - For we are all guilty of murdering our LORD if ever we have resisted His word...
 - And there is not a one of us that has not resisted His word...
 - The same stubborn, wicked spirit is in the very root of our fallen nature.
 - This is why we so desperately need to repent of our pride and receive His salvation.

TRANS> And so you see that greatest revelation brought out the greatest wickedness in man.

- Men are so resistant to God that when His revelation comes very near in all its fullness, they go to whatever lengths are necessary to resist it.
 - What about you—are you resisting God's grace today?
 - Then you are of the same spirit as the scribes and Pharisees.

III. But I want you to know that there is a way back, even though you have resisted Him.

A. Our gracious LORD adds the word “**till**” in verse 39.

1. Do you see it? He says...
 - v. 39: “For I say to you, you shall see Me no more **till** you say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of LORD.”
2. That word “**till**” is very precious indeed!
 - a. Israel was busy resisting Christ and was about to launch into her final killing campaign...
 - and when it was complete,
 - when she had crucified her Messiah and all those who came to her to proclaim Him after His death and resurrection,

- He would depart from her... but only **till**...
- b. Only **till** she was ready to receive the glorious gospel...
 - Instead of persecuting His messengers who bring the word of God to her, when she is ready to say “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD.”
 - When she is ready to receive her Messiah and to acknowledge that God’s favour and God’s salvation is to be found in no other name.
 - Then He will return to her.
- c. Now I hate to get into certain aspects of eschatology because it is a subject that the church has not fully worked out in her creeds...
 - It’s something we are still learning about and studying about...
 - But there are a lot of passages in the scripture that seem to indicate that this **till** that Jesus refers to here is something that Israel **will** do...
 - that the time will come when she—as a corporate people—will receive her Messiah.
 - In Romans 11:25, Paul says that “blindness has happened to Israel **until** the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.”
 - then in verse 26, he adds, “And so all Israel will be saved,” and he speaks about the immutability of God’s promise to them and how they will in time receive mercy.
 - And so it appears that the day will come when they will, as nation, turn back to the Lord.
 - He will come to them when they stop rejecting Him, spurning His prophets and wise men and scribes,
 - and start receiving the ones who come in the name of the Lord because they receive the One who comes in the name of LORD, even Jesus.

B. This same hope belongs to us as Gentiles as well...

1. Paul warned the Gentiles in Romans 11 that they must not do as Israel had done...
 - become proud and reject the grace of God.
 - It they did, he told us that God would cut us off also...
 - that Jesus would depart from us even as He departed from Israel...
 - And history has shown this to be true...

- There are many nations where the gospel once flourished that are now cut off...
 - Some of them still have an outward form and have not yet been entirely removed—just as Israel had not in Jesus day and was not until 70 AD...
 - But there are many nations that He has left desolate who once knew Him.
2. But the same promise applies to them...
- If they will turn to the LORD, and say of Him, “blessed is He who comes in the name of Lord,” and will again receive His word of grace,
 - They will be grafted in again...
 - He will return to them and will bless them with salvation.
3. And my friends, this also applies to you as individuals...
- Once you say, “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD,”
 - and you begin to receive rather than spurn God’s revelation to you---
 - *your desolation ceases!!!*
 - **Then** you are able to receive all the riches of God’s grace... grace that will bless your socks off!
 - Then you will have the riches of Jesus Christ flooding your soul with new life.
 - Oh how you should hunger for Him!
 - It is so foolish to resist Him whose Word is our very life!