

Saved By Grace Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Tim Bartels

Trinity 10, 2013
Luke 19:41-48ⁱ

Part I

Jesus came to Jerusalem for the last time in today's text. He was one among hundreds of thousands of pilgrims. They were on their way to celebrate the Passover. Jesus was among those that came up a long ascent from the east. As he drew near the city, he reached the top of the ascent and rounded the Mount of Olives. When he did, he caught sight of a marvelous vista. From the Mount of Olives, he could see across the Kidron Valley and see the city set among the surrounding hills.

The city was encircled with a high thick stone wall. It took about four miles of wall to wrap around the city. Inside the wall on the south side was the *lower city*. It consisted of limestone houses. They were colored yellow-brown from years of sun and wind. To the west was the *upper city*. It consisted of white marbled homes of the very rich. The marbled homes stood out like patches of snow. Two large arched passage ways spanned a valley from the upper city to the temple.

The temple was the *city center*. Its architecture was stunning. Its gold embellishment gleamed in the sun. It was God's dwelling place on earth, after all. From that dwelling place his word was taught. His word taught that he would send the Messiah to take away the sin of the world. Smoke from the temple sacrifices wafted to heaven daily. Its sacrifice foreshadowed how the Messiah would be the Lamb of God slain for the sin of the world. The Messiah was at the *heart and core* of temple worship.ⁱⁱ

...but there was a problem. We get a glimpse of that when Jesus eventually enters the temple courtyard. In it merchants were selling lambs required for the Passover sacrifice. Now these merchants knew "the law of supply and demand" before it was called that. They were the suppliers. The Passover pilgrims had the demand. They were at the merchant's mercy. It was kind of like going to a stadium. You pay through the teeth *because* they are the *only* suppliers and you are hungry. So, the merchants took advantage of the people. It was the same as if they were stealing them blind.

It all hinted to a deeper problem. Jeremiah gives us insight into it. Just after the words from our Old Testament lesson God asks, "Will you

steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you do not know, and then come and stand before me in this house which is called by my name and say, 'We are delivered to do all these abominations'? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of thieves?ⁱⁱⁱ"

The problem was that they had estranged themselves *from God*. Once they did that, then it *followed* that they mistreated their neighbor; and it's not because they weren't religious. They *were*. They were very religious. They heard God's word, but in hearing it they *changed it* to what they wanted to hear.

Things aren't any different today. For example, much of the church has a *low view* of God's word. That means God's word has taken *second place* to man's ideas. It has taken second place to false philosophies, cultural influences, and works righteousness. When God's word takes second place to man's ideas, the foundations the faith are denied. Then the Christian faith is but a shell of what it was.

It reminds me of the way one man pictured it.^{iv} He said to picture the church as a beautiful cathedral. It has a high ceiling with arches reaching to the peak and rafters made of rich wood grain. The walls are lined with beautiful stained glass. Sturdy oak pews make neat rows. A pipe organ with its impressive ranks fills the balcony. _____ Up front and center, stand an oak pulpit and altar.

Underneath the foundation and unseen to the eye, though, something is not right. Acid has been eating away at it. It is the acid of robbing the word of its power. That acid began working a long time ago. It did when men began to deny the authority of God's word. It has been slowly working ever since. It has been eating deeper and deeper into the foundation. So you have this big beautiful cathedral called the Christian Church standing, but just barely.

Evidence of its collapsing is visible. Since God's word is divested of its power, interfaith services are held, worship practices conform to the world, and sins are condoned. Much of the church has embraced it; and all under the *pretense* of religion.

Could the same be said of us? Do we use religion as a pretense? We do, when we treat sin as if it were a *minor* thing. "It's no big deal. My sin is just the normal. Don't make it any bigger than it is." We do when we *smile* at sin. "It just happened to me. I was just having fun. What's so wrong with that?" We do when we buy into the *mindset* that there is no absolute truth. "We

can't be so sure of the truth. After all, there are many other creeds. All of them can't be wrong."

When we buy into any of this it is because there is a deeper problem. We have *estranged ourselves* from God. God's word tells us what is right and wrong, what is true faith and false faith, *but* we want to do it our way. So we make God's word say what we want it to say. When we do, we rob God's word of its power. All the while we give the *appearance* of being religious; of hiding behind religion.

It's like using religion as den for thieves. That is, we often act like bank robbers, the Jesse James and Al Capone's of yesterday. After robbing the bank, they fled on horseback and in getaway cars to their hide outs. There they sought safety from the law that hunted for them. We do the same thing when we think we are safe to do the sins we do; when we seek that safety *under* the pretense of religion. **It's nothing else but a den of thieves.**

Part II

That's how the people in Jesus' day acted and thought. It's what he saw as he looked upon the city, but as Jesus saw the vista before him he also saw into the future. He saw Jerusalem's *ruin*.

It's not that Jerusalem didn't have an opportunity to escape ruin. It did. Down through the centuries, God sent his prophets. One by one they pointed to the Messiah. They preached about the Lamb of God, the heart and core of temple worship. Though they heard about God's Messiah, the people wanted a different messiah. Now that the Messiah had actually come, they still did not want him; and within the week the den of thieves lynched Jesus and put him to death.

This rejection of Jesus left them in their sin; and sin brings judgment on the sinner. Judgment against Israel came in 70 AD. It was the time of the Passover again. At that time God sent his agent of wrath, the Roman general, Titus. Titus surrounded Jerusalem with his legions. He came with his soldiers; his battering rams; and his catapults. As he surrounded the city, he let Passover pilgrims into the city, but not out. It is estimated that there were 700,000 in the city at that time.^v

Eventually, Titus took the city. The slaughter was unimaginable. Six out of every seven were put to death. Some were hoisted on crosses; others were struck down by sword. Bodies were piled in heaps. Blood ran through

the streets. They cit and its temple were razed to the ground. Words can't describe the horror of it. It all happened *because* Israel rejected Jesus.

The destruction of Jerusalem is a *picture* of hell. That's what waits the sinner - any of us - who acts like church is a place for a den of thieves; who uses religion as a pretense to do evil; who think they are safe to sin. The siege towers and battering rams of **God's wrath will reduce the den of thieves to the rubbles of hell.**

Part III

Jesus sees *all* of this. When he does, he does *not* say, "They deserve what they get." He does *not* say, "They have it coming." Not at all! Instead, it breaks his heart; tears him up; wrenches his gut. He weeps. He sheds tears. He is *deeply* saddened that the sinner plunges to his own destruction.

This gives us a *glimpse* into Jesus' heart. Jesus does "not take pleasure in the death of the wicked."^{vii} Jesus "wants all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth."^{viii} That means Jesus *does not want* anyone to go to hell; sent to its rubble. He *wants* all people to be in heaven with him; safe from ruin.

Not only that, but Jesus paid the way *for all* to be in heaven. It is what all those lambs bought in the temple *foreshadowed*. Thousands of them were bought and then taken to the temple priests. The Passover pilgrims waited in line for the priests to slaughter their lambs. In normal years, young children ran outside the city wall. They waited by the brook that flowed from the temple site. They wanted to be the first the see the blood of those lambs flow down that brook.

The blood *did* flow. It flowed *when* Jesus was hoisted on the cross outside that city wall. He was God's lamb and God laid on him the sin of the *world*. The Lamb of God gave his life; and, in so doing, God did take away the sin of all. No sin is left unpaid. No sin is too big. No sins are too many. All sin is paid for; sins of the worst kind; sins of those who use religion as a pretense. *Your* sins are paid for. *You* are saved. You are saved *not* to return to a den of thieves; *not* to see religion as a pretense *to* sin. You are saved *to* find refuge *from* sin in the wounds of Jesus.

That's the heart Jesus has for you, the sinner. It gives you a *heart*, in turn, for those still stuck in their sin; for those who have strayed from him; for those headed for the ultimate ruin of hell. He gives you a heart that prays for; a heart that yearns for their salvation. After all, it is the heart Jesus has shown you.

To be sure, Jesus has a heart; a heart for sinners. That heart is found in his word. Though many today *try* to divest the word of its power, the word *is* God's power. *No one* can take that from God's word. By means of it, God brings Jesus *to* you; he brings you the salvation Jesus won *for* you. By means of it, Jesus will *not* let you go; he holds you securely in his hand. He holds you securely *no matter what*. He will not let anything - no false religion, no sorrow, no trouble, no pain - come between him and you. He won't *because* his shed blood was shed for you. **Behind that shed blood are his tears of his love.** Amen!

ⁱ Citations of the text (NKJV) will not be cited in the sermon

ⁱⁱ The description of Jerusalem's vista was gleaned from bible-history.com/Jerusalem/first-centuryjerusalem_destruction_of_jerusalem

ⁱⁱⁱ Jeremiah 7.9-11

^{iv} The illustration as remembered was given by Craig Parton

^v Op. cit., bible-history.com. This number comes from Tacitus, a historian at the time. Another historian at the siege, Josephus, puts the number at about 1.2 million.

^{vi} Ezekiel 33.11

^{vii} I Timothy 2.4