

Tears for Jerusalem

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Preacher: Andy Prideaux

- [0 : 0 0] As we remain standing, let's pray. Father God, we thank you for gathering us together today to worship your Son, the Lord Jesus, to celebrate what he has done for us.
- Father, as we come to your word now, please deepen our faith in him. Teach us what it means to have him as our King. We pray for Jesus' sake. Amen. Please be seated. Again, I apologize for my voice.
- I hope it doesn't get too annoying. A couple of weeks ago, Ness and I were watching one of those B-grade romance flicks, as you do on a Sunday night, just to unwind.
- It was on telly. It was called Under the Tuscan Sun, I think. I don't know if anyone caught that movie. Anyway, it was about an American woman who had left the States and moved to Tuscany to start a new life.
- She'd bought a 300-year-old building, I think it was, and she was going to renovate that, find her Italian lover, and live happily ever after, writing books in Tuscany.
- [1 : 0 3] Pretty standard plot line, you might say. One of the subplots, though, is quite interesting. It was this sort of kind of superstitious form of Roman Catholicism that sort of was sprinkled throughout the film.
- And this woman found that she was drawn to this. So in her home, she found these old pictures of Mary. The real estate agent gave her a statue of the patron saint of cooking.
- She was really into cooking and fine cuisine. She went to religious parades in the town where she was living with people carrying huge statues of saints through the streets and throwing flowers and kissing their feet, things like that.
- And she was drawn to these things because she thought of them sort of like as guardian angels or even good luck charms. Devotion to these things she thought might help all of her dreams for a new life in Tuscany come true.
- The movie was quite light-hearted. I wasn't trying to make any grand theological statement, but it did lead to an interesting theological discussion in our lounge room. My wife, Ness, asked her a very good question.
- [2 : 1 1] She said, look, why do people look in all the wrong places for the things that they need? Why do people look in all the wrong places for God? Why turn to Mary for help when her Savior and our Savior is Jesus Christ, God's Son?
- Why pray to a fellow saint, another Christian, when through Christ's death on the cross for us, we can come into the very presence of the living God and present our requests to Him?
- Why waste time with ritual observance? Why serve dead idols to find assurance? Pardon me. When in Christ, we discover the one who's already done everything that is needful in order to bring us to God.
- Thanks, Warwick. There are probably a number of ways to answer these questions, but we kept coming back to this answer. People don't come to Jesus Christ because He's a threat to them.

People don't come to Jesus Christ because He is a threat to them. You see, Jesus confronts us, doesn't He?

[3 : 15] He challenges our right to rule our lives and the world in our way. He refuses just to merely slot into our religious insurance policy schemes while in the actual practice of our daily lives we basically just get on with living for our lives, ourselves basically ignoring Him.

He refuses to be a mere good luck charm who'll make all our dreams come true in Tuscany or anywhere else. Jesus is God's Son. He's the King who brings God's kingdom.

If we enter into this kingdom through faith in Him, yes, we have eternal life. Yes, we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms, but if we don't have Him as our King, as our Lord, well, we don't have Him at all.

Now, we've been hearing from the Gospel of Luke together over the last few weeks, and when you read the Gospels, this is what we find, isn't it? Jesus is not simply just another wise teacher or sage or even life coach, someone who we can take what we need from but then move on to the next method or guru or charm or idea.

No, when Jesus meets people, worlds collide, kingdoms clash, and that's because when Jesus Christ entered our world, as I'm saying, He entered as God's King who brings in God's kingdom.

[4 : 32] So early on in Luke chapter 4, we read that people were trying to get Jesus to work to their timetable, their agenda for what they thought this new healer should be doing.

But He says, Look, I must preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. That is why I was sent. And this clash of kingdoms happens in the spiritual realm as well. So in Luke chapter 11, verse 20, Jesus there is the strong man who casts out demons by the finger of God, showing, He says, that the kingdom of God has come to you.

The clash happens at a human religious level. In chapter 11, verse 53, we read that the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose Him fiercely and to besiege Him with questions, waiting to catch Him in something He might say.

You see, Jesus doesn't merely slot into things. He challenges, He divides people right down the middle. In fact, in Luke chapter 12, He says that this is why He's come.

I came to bring fire to the earth and how I wish it were already kindled. I have a baptism with which to be baptized and what stress I am under until it is completed. Do you think that I've come to bring peace to the earth?

[5 : 43] No, I tell you, but rather division. From now on, five in one household will be divided. Three against two and two against three. They will be divided. Father against son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

But this kingdom that Jesus brings in is also quite surprising in other ways. It doesn't look all that impressive at first. As we were reminded last week, it's as small as a mustard seed.

And it seems that unlikely people enter it. Not the religious, but sinners and tax collectors, prostitutes. These are the people that Jesus keeps hanging out with and welcoming into God's kingdom.

These people are turning back to Him. And this King who brings it in, much to the disciples' disappointment at first, doesn't bring it in with the sword, does He? But through His rejection, humiliation, and death.

Jesus actually has already predicted His death in Jerusalem, the place where God's King would reign, three times in Luke's Gospel. He'll do it for a fourth time, we'll hear in our passage today.

[6 : 50] In fact, the verses we're looking at form the centerpiece of a narrative in Luke, which begins in chapter 9, verse 51, and goes through to 19, and verse 44.

It's often called the travel narrative, not because Jesus was going on holidays or going on a cruise or something, but because from this point, He resolutely sets His face, 9.51 says, to go to Jerusalem.

Everything that happens here is about realizing the end of this journey. And we see in our passage today that this is where He sees the true pinnacle of His ministry as lying.

So I want to pick up the action again at verse 31. Please open to this, actually, if you haven't got it open, on page 849 of your Bibles. Luke, chapter 13, verse 31, says, At that very hour, some Pharisees came and said to Him, Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.

Jesus has just been discussing who will be in the feast of God's kingdom. And again, He gives some surprising answers. Some who are last will be first, and some who are first will be last.

[8 : 01] Well, now in verse 31, we meet the Pharisees again. These are religious leaders whom Jesus regularly knocks heads with in the Gospels. These were people who took the Scriptures very seriously, though.

These were purists. These were people who were devout in following God and trying to be different to the world around them. But they, at the same time, were failing to recognize God's Messiah.

Well, on this occasion, they come to Jesus to warn Him about King Herod's plot, his intention to kill Jesus. We're not told what the Pharisees' motivation was at this point. They certainly weren't natural allies of Herod and the Sadducees, the sort of sect that he was a part of.

They saw them as the aristocracy, people who'd compromised with Rome. Herod's just a puppet king of the Romans. They're the sort of political pragmatists. We're the true religious group.

That's how they saw them. Although they certainly weren't above combining with their enemies in the cause of coming against their common enemy, Jesus, as we'll see in the Gospel.

[9 : 05] So we're not sure. Were they trying to warn Jesus about Herod, or were they actually working with Him, trying to get Jesus out of that area? I'm not exactly sure, although the encounter with the Pharisees later on doesn't lead us to be too optimistic about their attitude toward Jesus.

But whatever the case, they certainly don't view Jesus as their king, do they? Someone they should respect or even fear as their ruler. No, on the contrary, it's Jesus who should fear Herod, they think.

Jesus' life is under threat from this king of the Jews. Do you hear the irony? God's true king is being warned that Herod, the king of the Jews, wants to kill him.

And of course, the warning makes sense from a human point of view. This is Herod Antipas, the man who had had John the Baptist beheaded. Not a very nice piece of work. He's the son of the Herod who had tried to have Jesus killed as a baby and many other boys died in the process.

But it's Jesus who in reality is the real threat in this situation, isn't he? Jesus challenges Herod's rule and Herod wants him removed just as he had John the Baptist removed for challenging Herod in other ways.

[10 : 29] But Jesus isn't intimidated by any mere human ruler, is he? As God's true prophet, God's true king, he won't be distracted from doing what he's been sent to do.

Listen to what that is in verse 32. He said to them, Go and tell that fox for me, Listen, I'm casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow and on the third day I finish my work.

Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem. What Jesus calls a spade a spade here, doesn't he?

He calls Herod that fox, an insult that means that person of no account, that deceiver, that destroyer. Go and tell Herod, Jesus says, I've actually got a message for him.

In fact, it's like the message he sent to John the Baptist who was being held in Herod's prison waiting to hear of his fate. Do you remember that? John the Baptist is starting to doubt things.

[11 : 30] He's in prison at Herod's mercy. Who's really in charge here? Who's the real king? I thought Jesus was the Messiah and yet here I am on death row in Herod's prison. What's the deal with that?

Well, do you remember Jesus' message for John the Baptist? What does he say? The blind see, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dead are raised. Good news is preached to the poor.

So stand firm, John. These are the signs of God's kingdom come and of his king. You know who the real king is. Well, Jesus' message here to Herod is, I'm not going to run.

I'm not going to hide. I'm going to keep doing what I've been sent to do. That is, he will bring to completion the signs of God's kingdom. Casting out demons, he says here.

Healing the sick until he comes to the culmination, the ultimate purpose, the fulfillment of what his father sent him to do. Why he came? To reach Jerusalem in order to die there.

[12 : 29] This is verse 33 again. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem. So Jesus knows who's in charge here, doesn't he?

Do you hear the irony again in Jesus' words for Herod? Yes, he will die, but not as the victim of circumstance or chance, not as the final sad interruption to an otherwise brilliant and amazing career as a healer and teacher or even as a result of some political intrigue or even as a martyr in the human cause for justice.

No, Jesus' death is not an interruption. It is his fundamental achievement. And again, Jesus talked about this since at least chapter 9 in Luke's Gospel.

Just after Peter's great confession that Jesus is the Messiah of God, the Christ, Jesus tells Peter and the other disciples there exactly what it will mean for him to be the Christ.

Jesus said to them, this is Luke 9 verse 20, Who do you say that I am? Peter answered, the Messiah of God. Jesus sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, saying, the Son of Man must undergo great suffering and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and scribes and be killed and on the third day be raised.

[13 : 54] Jesus, who is described in this passage and other places as the great prophet in continuity with God's suffering messengers or prophets of old will bring God's message of salvation and he'll also suffer and die because of it.

It's interesting, even at the moment in Luke's gospel where we glimpse Christ's glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, he's flanked by the two great prophetic figures of the Old Testament, isn't he?

Moses and Elijah and at that moment Jesus' glory is revealed and we read that they spoke about his exodus which he was about to bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem.

You see, God's people would be redeemed and rescued, not this time through Moses and from physical slavery in Egypt, but from their own sin through Jesus' death on the cross, his exodus that he would bring to fulfillment in Jerusalem.

God is the one who is working out, has worked out his saving purpose through his son and no human king can stand in his way.

[15 : 03] God's kingdom will be established and it will be established in his way through the death of the prophet like but greater than Moses and more than a prophet God's son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

This means, of course, that it's not Jesus who should be fearing the Pharisees' plot or death threats from Herod. They should be fearing, they should be honoring him, at least if they want any part in God's kingdom.

What a great encouragement these verses are for the children of the king who suffer in the world today for their faith in Christ.

I think of Chinese Christians imprisoned, tortured, even put to death because of their faith in the king who would rival communist authorities. Yes, they've suffered with Christ, they seem weak and powerless before this human kingdom, but they've also been raised with Christ and they will be raised with Christ in glory and reign with him.

And when I read the prayer letter of the Voice of the Martyrs when they tell me about our brothers and sisters in China and other places, it's very clear that they know who the real king is, which is why they don't give in to fear, which is why, remarkably, they not only persist in their faith in Christ, but in proclaiming Christ, whatever the cost to their lives, which is why, of course, they're a great example to us.

[16 : 36] Please come and pray for the persecuted church on Tuesday night if you can. But what about us? Are we tempted to be cowered down by the ridicule, perhaps, of Western intellectuals because of our faith in the suffering servant king?

Are we tempted to put our trust in human kingdoms, human security, or do we live in fear that maybe Islam or the godless, secular society will one day triumph? Well, not if we remember Jesus our king who suffered and died, not in defeat, but in accomplishment of God's great victory over sin and death, a victory that now, by faith, we share in with all our brothers and sisters from all over the world.

See, as Jesus challenged and encouraged John the Baptist as he sat in Herod's prison, uncertain of his future, of his life, so we're challenged and encouraged in these verses to stand firm in our faith in Christ, the true king.

But of course, this isn't the way that Jesus or his people are often viewed by the watching world, this great kingdom that Jesus has achieved and is achieving.

And often a way of denying the threat or the challenge of King Jesus or a way of dismissing it, I guess, is by pitying Jesus. So I was sitting next to a visitor to one of our public meetings a couple of weeks ago, a very interesting man, a lecturer in law.

[18 : 09] He's sort of a seeker after Christian things, but he's also a little bit, a tad cynical, I guess, and he came along to see how the little Christian group on campus was getting along. He wanted to know how I felt as a Christian minister about our relatively small group, about 200 students involved, but that's in the context of 40,000 students or so on campus.

There are other Christian groups, but still, doesn't seem like much is happening, or he pointed out the shrinking numbers across all the denominations. He said, you know, the latest census will just show us the same thing, won't it?

Poor old Jesus. Poor old church. I don't know if you know that great Beatles song, Eleanor Rigby, from 1966, a great song. Remember Father McKenzie, the English vicar in that song?

Father McKenzie, writing the words to a sermon that no one will hear. No one comes near. Look at him working, darning his socks by the fire when there's nobody there. What does he care?

Or at Eleanor Rigby's funeral, wiping the dirt from his hands as he walks from the grave, no one was saved. Poor old church. Poor old antiquated institution.

[19 : 16] Just sort of slowly drifting away. That was a McCartney song. His fellow bandmate, John Lennon, actually prophesied that Christianity would shrivel and die, while rock and roll music would be the thing that lived on and truly connected people.

Christianity just doesn't seem to have the appeal it once used to. If only it would change some of its views about the uniqueness of Christ, maybe change some of its ethical stands, get him more in tune with the times, then, you know, maybe there'd be some strength there.

And there are those within the visible church who are saying the same thing. So bad old Bishop Spong writes a book entitled Why the Church or Christianity or something like that must change or die. His colleague, the Episcopalian Primate of America, thinks that watering down the uniqueness of Christ might help in this cause.

We who practice the Christian tradition, she says, understand Jesus as our vehicle to the divine, but for us to assume that God could not act in other ways, I think, is to put God in an awfully small box.

But Jesus is not merely our vehicle to the divine. He is God with us. He is God's appointed ruler of the world, our only hope.

[20 : 31] And it's not he or his people who need to be lamented and pitied, who need the world's tears. No. Long after the kingdoms of this world have faded into nothing, Christ's kingdom will stand.

No. Jesus is the one who laments in this passage over God's people, Israel, over Jerusalem, who fail to recognize its true king, its true judge, and its true savior.

Verse 34, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you are not willing.

See, your house is left to you, and I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Jesus laments this city and its people, a people he longed to protect like a mother hen gathers its chicks to itself.

And with these words, Jesus is really opening up God's heart to us, isn't he? Showing us God's heart, mourning the sins of his people who refuse to turn to him and be healed like Ezekiel the prophet saying, why will you die, O Israel?

[21 : 51] God's often been described in these bird-like terms, I'm not sure what the adjective for that is, but in the Old Testament, Isaiah 31, like birds hovering overhead, the Lord Almighty will shield Jerusalem, he will shield it and deliver it.

But the tragedy is that just as Jerusalem of old rejected God's prophets and so his word, so too Jesus will be rejected and put to death.

See, the death of Christ does speak to us of God's great rescue plan, yes, that's true, but it also speaks to us of the darkness of human sin, doesn't it?

That instead of receiving the word of God's prophets and ultimately his son, we block our ears, we push God away, we even kill his mouthpieces. Jesus says here that that's exactly what Israel has done again and again in its history.

Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it by God. Now, the other part of the reading we had from Luke, we get yet another picture of this rejection and I just want to look at that briefly.

[23 : 04] Let's look at chapter 14, verse 1 again. On one occasion, when Jesus was going to the house of the leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.

Just then in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy and Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath or not? But they were silent.

So Jesus took him and healed him and sent him away. Then he said to them, if one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a Sabbath day?

And they could not reply to this. What's going on? Well, Jesus is dining at the home of an important leader of the Pharisees, the group that had just warned Jesus about Herod.

On the Sabbath, a man happens to be there with a terrible condition which results in the building up of fluids, a dreadful swelling of the body called dropsy.

[23 : 59] Apparently it was a condition that Jews at that time attributed to God's judgment. So he is a man whom the Pharisees are heartlessly using in their ruse to trap Jesus, trying to catch him out, not resting, breaking the law on the Sabbath, by healing on the Sabbath.

But look at how Jesus loves this man. Sabbath or not, trap or not, in verse 4 we read that Jesus took him, the word is literally embraced the man, and healed him.

So yet again Jesus shows that he brings in God's new era of restoration, even as he restores this man's broken body. He shows his power as the true king, and he demonstrates God's amazing love for this man who up to this point was considered as unclean and somehow deserving of his condition.

But the tragedy of this account lies in the fact that the Pharisees see no sign of the presence of God's kingdom in this miracle of Jesus.

And so while Jesus reveals his own true character and identity, well he also ends up revealing theirs, doesn't he? afraid of having their true intentions exposed, they can only stay silent before Jesus probing questions.

[25 : 17] You see, God does love us with an everlasting love, like a hen for her chicks, but Israel, but the world, has failed to love him.

And Jesus describes the consequence here of Israel's rejection in particular. Verse 35 AC, your house is left to you. Your house is left to you means that the nation of Israel is left desolate, left to themselves, but abandoned by God.

Or to pick up an image that Jesus uses earlier in chapter 13, it seems that the fig tree has been cut down. As Leo Morris wrote, God no longer lives there.

That is the final disaster. So what hope for Israel, Jerusalem, what hope for the world? Read on 1335, and I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

The one who comes in the name of the Lord, as Jesus here is quoting from Psalm 118, verse 26, is God's Messiah, and he is come in Christ. Only those who welcome him, who bless him, will find hope in him.

[26 : 40] Now it's true that Jesus is welcomed this way into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. You read on in Luke's Gospel, these exact words are said, aren't they? Blessed is who comes in the name of the Lord. But Jesus himself knows at that point that his welcome into Jerusalem is short lived.

And at that point too, he weeps over Jerusalem, as he moves steadily towards his rejection and death on the cross only a few days later. Now it's only after his death and resurrection that Jesus is recognized truly as God's king, and actually people from Israel and from the nations begin to acknowledge him as their Lord.

That of course is the great story of Luke's second volume Acts, isn't it? As we hear about the news of the Gospel of King Jesus spreading throughout Jerusalem and then out through the Roman Empire.

So listen to just a little bit of Acts. This is Peter just after he's preached from the Hebrew Bible, from the Old Testament, and shown how Jesus is the true king. And at the end he says, Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom he crucified.

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, Brothers, what should we do? Peter said to them, Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

[28 : 05] For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him. And Peter testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were at it. we're not to lament Jesus.

It's the world that has turned its back on Christ. It's churches that are tempted to follow suit, actually, that need our tears. More than that, they need to hear again the invitation, the challenge of Jesus, which still stands.

And every time his word is taken out, it is declared. And that is to welcome, rather than reject God's Son, the Lord, Jesus Christ. Because you see, in the end, Jesus will be one of two things for every single human being who's ever walked the face of this planet, and one of two things only.

He'll either be their saviour and king, or their condemning judge. So this must be the Jesus, Jesus according to himself, according to the scriptures, that we proclaim on campus to the 40,000 or so students there, to the people of Doncaster, that we take out to the world.

[29 : 32] Jesus Christ, the king of love, the true ruler of the world, in whom alone is true forgiveness and our true source of life and freedom found.

Getting back to what we were thinking about at the beginning, Jesus does threaten us. He does threaten our right to rule ourselves. He is a disturbing interruption. He disturbs our status quo.

He interrupts our neat plans, our personal goals, our endless quests for personal comfort and luxury, whatever it might be. He does take us from the centre of our lives, from the throne, and says, I must reign there.

But he does that ultimately for our greatest good, you see, and for God's great glory. Jesus is God's son. He's the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

He is uniquely qualified to be our saviour and to be our king. Nobody else is. Jesus is. And he alone is worthy of our lives and of our praise.

[30 : 37] let's pray. Father God, we thank you for your incredible love for us, that you would send your son, the Lord Jesus, into the world to become like us and to die for us, that we might become children of the king, that we might become disciples of Christ, that we might live lives that bring glory to you as we submit to Jesus as our king, as we trust in him as our great saviour.

Father God, we thank you that today we have gathered together to celebrate, to remember and to live in the light of the fact that we belong to Jesus. Father, help us not just to do that today, but every day of our lives.

Father, help us to be people, help us to be congregations here at Holy Trinity who are known by our love for Christ and for his people. Father God, strengthen us, deepen our knowledge and our love of Christ that we might persevere in our faith in him to our life's end, bringing glory to him alone, enjoying him forever, our great King and saviour.

Father, we pray it for Jesus' sake. Amen.