**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**JESUS IN JERUSALEM**

**Luke 19:45-20:19**

**INTRODUCTION**

We have reached the climax of Luke’s Gospel as Luke begins to narrate Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem. Jerusalem plays a key role in salvation history. It was the heart of the Jewish people and of the Jewish faith. Jerusalem was the ancient seat of King David and his descendants. It was also the location of God’s Temple, where God chose to powerfully manifest his presence to his people. God’s presence was so closely tied to Jerusalem and the Temple that the Psalms actually call Jerusalem “the City of God”.

Jerusalem was more than just a home to the Jewish people. It was their *hope*. When times got tough for the Jewish people, they didn’t just look to God. They looked to God’s City. Jerusalem gave them hope, because they believed that God’s salvation would one day come out of Jerusalem. Psalm 14:7 expresses this hope like this:

“Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the LORD restores the fortunes of his people, let Jacob rejoice, let Israel be glad.”

The Jewish people believed that their salvation would come out of Jerusalem. As the City of God would go, so the people of God would go. If it suffered, the people suffered. If it thrived, the people thrived. Such were the ebbs and flows of Israel’s history as they alternated between righteousness and God’s favour, and sin and God’s discipline. The Jews believed, however, that this would all come to an end when the Messiah finally arrived. God’s Chosen One would usher in an eternal kingdom of righteousness when the Son of David reigned from the Throne of David. As God said in Psalm 2:6-7 said,

“As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill… ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.”

As we saw a few weeks ago, these prophecies about the Messiah arriving in Jerusalem have just been fulfilled in Luke 19. Jesus is the Messiah, and he has finally arrived at Jerusalem’s gates. The moment that the Jews had longed for for hundreds of years had finally arrived. God was setting his King on Zion, his holy hill, and he would bring salvation to his people.

So as Jesus descends the Mount of Olives, riding on a donkey as the prophet Zephaniah foretold, he’s surrounded by the sounds of singing and praise as his disciples rejoice and cry out, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” This was a time to celebrate and rejoice.

But Jesus doesn’t rejoice. As he looks upon Jerusalem, the beloved City of God, he weeps. He wails and cries out in deep sorrow. Why? Because he already knows that the people in the city have rejected him. They had waited so long for the Messiah, but when he finally arrived, they would not only ignore him. They would murder him. As a result, Jesus foretells judgment. The city would be sacked, and the Temple would be destroyed, because Israel did not know the time of their visitation.

This is what we are to keep in mind as we look at our text today and read about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. It helps us understand why Jesus isn’t greeted by praise and celebration as he enters the city, but by confrontation, opposition, and plots against his life.

The title of this message is **Jesus in Jerusalem.** My aim today is to show you that **Jesus Rejects Those Who Reject Him.**

We will have three points today:

1. THE TEMPLE
2. THE TEACHING
3. THE TENANTS

(1) **THE TEMPLE**

As Jesus enters Jerusalem, Luke tells us in verse 45 that the first thing Jesus does is enter the Temple, and the first thing he does when he gets there is he starts clearing the place out. The Temple courtyard was filled with vendors. Some were selling animals for sacrifice, and some were exchanging foreign currency so that pilgrims could pay the Temple Tax.

Luke tells us that, as Jesus entered the Temple courtyard, he “began to drive out those who sold”. The other gospels fill out some of the details of what this looked like. Matthew and Mark tell us that Jesus

“overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons” (Matt. 12:12; Mark 11:15)

John tells us something similar, except he adds this:

“And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables.” (John 2:15)

Jesus was clearly angry about what these vendors were doing, but why? After all, weren’t they providing a valuable service to these worshippers? How else would they obtain their animals for sacrifice? How else would they pay the Temple tax?

Jesus wasn’t angry because of what they were doing, but *how* they were doing it. There was nothing wrong with offering services to people to facilitate their worship, but there was something wrong with exploiting people in the process. That’s what the vendors were doing, which is why Jesus says in verse 46 that the Temple had become a “den of *robbers*”.

These venders weren’t just selling to the people. They were robbing them by charging exorbitant prices. That’s what made Jesus so angry.

Notice what Jesus says in verse 46 as he clears these crooks out of the Temple. He says, “It is *written*.” Both of these phrases – “house of prayer” and “den of robbers” – are biblical phrases. More specifically, they have prophetic significance, and they call us to look more closely to their original, Old Testament context.

The phrase “My house shall be a house of prayer” comes from Isaiah 56:6-7, which says this:

“And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,

to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,

and to be his servants,

everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it,

and holds fast my covenant—

these I will bring to my holy mountain,

and make them joyful **in my house of prayer**;

their burnt offerings and their sacrifices

will be accepted on my altar;

for my house shall be called **a house of prayer**

for all peoples.”

Isaiah tells us that the Temple wasn’t only to be a house of prayer. It was supposed to be a house of prayer *for all peoples*. This prophecy was about foreigners, Gentile, non-Jewish people, becoming believers in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and how God would gather them to himself by bringing them to his Temple with joy. This reminds us of Israel’s mission. Israel was to live as witnesses to the world so that the nations would be drawn to the true worship of the true God, because God isn’t only the God of Israel. He is the God of all people from every tribe, language, nation, and tongue.

We see that being fulfilled in our text. The only reason why money changers are in the Temple was because people from all over the world with all kinds of different currency were coming to worship God in the Temple. Exodus 30 required worshippers to pay a Temple tax worth half a shekel to aid with maintaining the Temple. These Jewish converts didn’t deal in shekels, so they needed their local currency to be converted.

For these foreigners, coming to Jerusalem was meant to be the pinnacle of their worship. It was meant to be a sacred and joyful time of prayer as they came to the “house of prayer” where God’s presence rested. But that’s not what they found. They found a den of robbers instead as these vendors sought to exploit their devotion to God.

The holiest place on earth had been overridden by crooks. Jesus calls it a “den”, or literally a “cave” of robbers to make us imagine a band of evil men scheming and plotting in secret, except this wasn’t in secret. This was in broad daylight in God’s Temple. These sinners saw no reason to hide. They believed so strongly that they could sin without repercussion or consequence that they cheated God’s people in God’s presence within God’s Temple and didn’t think twice about it. God’s house of prayer had truly become a den of robbers.

Where does the phrase “den of robbers” come from? That comes from one of the other great prophets: the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah lived at a time that was very similar to Jesus’ time. It was a time when Israel thought they were right with God but weren’t. One of the reasons why they thought they were right with God was that the city of Jerusalem and the Temple within it were still in fine shape. The Temple made them feel good about themselves. When they looked at it, it made them feel strong. Confident. Safe. It made them feel significant, because they had built this magnificent structure. They had adorned it with their wealth. They had surrounded it with mighty walls that no enemy could breach. As long as it stood, they didn’t think anything could happen to them.

But they were wrong. Outwardly they may have been prospering, but inwardly they were rotten with sin. They were saying everything right, but doing everything wrong, because their trust wasn’t in God. It was in God’s Temple. They found their confidence and security in the Temple itself rather than the God who made the Temple special in the first place. So God sent the prophet Jeremiah to them to warn them that if they did not repent, disaster would come upon them. This is what Jeremiah said in Chapter 7:

“Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’ – only to go on doing all these abominations? Has this house, which is called by my name, become a *den of robbers* in your eyes?” (verses 9-11)

There it is, the phrase “den of robbers”. This is where Jesus gets the phrase from. Jesus borrows this phrase from Jeremiah Chapter 7 to warn Israel that what happened in Jeremiah’s time would now happen again.

And what was that? Jeremiah tells us later on in Chapter 7:

“And now, because you have done all these things, declares the LORD, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, **and in which you trust**, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight…” (verses 13-15)

The people didn’t trust God. They trusted God’s Temple, and because of that, they thought that as long as the Temple stood strong, they could lie, cheat, steal, and worship whoever they wanted. Therefore, God says that he will do to the Temple what he did to Shiloh. He would destroy it.

Shiloh was the place where the Tabernacle was kept. The Tabernacle was like a prototype of the Temple, a “mobile Temple” that Israel carried with it as it travelled out of Egypt to the Promised Land. Once Israel arrived in the Promised Land, they erected the Tabernacle at Shiloh, where it functioned as the Temple of God until the actual Temple was built in Jerusalem. But because of Israel’s idolatry, God wiped out the Tabernacle and left Shiloh destitute, forsaken, and destroyed.

Jeremiah says that’s what’s going to happen to the Temple, and sure enough, a few years later, the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple, and carried God’s people into exile.

This is what we’re meant to have in the back of our minds when Jesus calls the Temple a “den of robbers”. The Temple may have been rebuilt in Jesus’ time, but the people who rebuilt it remained as sinful as ever. They had come to trust the work of their hands more than the God who had commissioned their work, and that led to all kinds of lawless living. So God would do what he did in the past: He would destroy the Temple yet again, because what was meant to be a house of prayer for all nations had become a den of robbers.

What Jesus did in cleansing the Temple had prophetic significance for Israel, but what does it mean for us? It teaches us this important lesson: when we trust God’s things rather than God himself, he tears those things down. When we feel that we can sin without consequence because this or that is going well in our lives, it’s only a matter of time before God ruins or removes those things. Our trust is meant to be in God, not God’s things, because if we trust in God’s things, we’re going to start down the slippery slope of sin just like Israel did. We’re going to believe that we’re fine with God as long as our Temples are doing well, when nothing could be further from the truth.

All of us are tempted to create our own Temples, things that we trust instead of God. I think one of the great “Temples” of our culture is physical health and beauty. People think that, as long as their bodies are healthy and strong, or as long as they’re physically attractive, they must be living the right way. They could be liars. Cheaters. Adulterers. Whatever. They believe that, as long as they’re working out three times a week and getting closer to their fitness goals, they think they can do whatever they want without consequence. Health and beauty become the standard by which they measure virtue. When they compare themselves to other people, they don’t just think they’re healthier or more attractive. They think they’re *better* than other people. They see someone who’s overweight, or someone who has chronic illness, or someone who’s just not that attractive and they think, “What a loser.” Those “losers” could be godly, virtuous people on the inside, but to those who trust in outward appearances, that doesn’t matter at all.

What’s your Temple? Have you created something in your own mind that gives you confidence that everything’s going to go well with you even when you sin? Perhaps it’s your job. Perhaps it’s your family. Maybe it’s your wealth. Whatever it is, you must heed the warning that when we trust God’s things rather than God himself, God won’t hesitate to tear those things down. As Psalm 39:11 says,

“When you discipline a man with rebukes for sin, you consume like a moth what is dear to him; surely all mankind is a mere breath!”

(2) **THE TEACHING**

After Jesus clears out the Temple, the scene then calms down in verse 47, where we find Jesus “teaching daily in the temple”, but it doesn’t take long for that peace to be broken as confrontation erupts once again. This leads to our second point: The Teaching.

Up until now, most of the confrontation that has happened with Jesus came from the Pharisees, but they’re out of the picture now. Here, in verse 47, a new group emerges to challenge Jesus: “the chief priests, and the scribes and the principal men of the city”. Luke tells us that they “were seeking to destroy him”. They wanted to kill him, because they felt that he was a threat to their way of life. But they couldn’t, at least not yet, because “all the people were hanging on his words.”

Jesus was a powerful teacher. His teaching was so compelling, and so clear, that right away, the people of the city gravitated to him. But mere teaching wouldn’t be enough. It wouldn’t be enough to soften their hardened hearts and help them see and believe that he was indeed the Messiah. These people may have been hanging on his words now, but in a few days, they would be clamouring for him to be hung on a cross.

The political and religious leaders of the city already want this to happen, but they can’t do anything until they get more public support. So instead of moving swiftly to arrest Jesus, they decide to test him. Verse 20 says that as Jesus was “teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up and said to him, ‘Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority.’”

Jesus isn’t a fool. He knows that their question isn’t genuine. They’re not asking him where his authority comes from because they’re genuinely interested in the answer. They’re just trying to trap him. They know that evidence isn’t credible unless it’s given by two or three witnesses, so if Jesus testifies about his authority by himself, he will have shown that he is not worthy of belief.

How Jesus replies is simply brilliant. With one, simple question, he both answers their question and exposes their true motives, turning the trappers into the trapped. Verse 2: “I also will ask you a question. Now tell me, was the baptism of John from heaven or from man?”

Jesus, of course, was speaking of John the Baptist, whom we read about earlier in Chapters 3 and 7. John was a prophet. Indeed, Jesus said he was the greatest prophet who ever lived, and yet he didn’t come to testify about himself. He came to testify about the one who would come after him, the one he wasn’t fit to tie the sandals of, to prepare the way for Jesus the Messiah. So when Jesus asks the city leaders where the baptism of John came from, he’s essentially saying, “Do you want to know where my authority comes from? Just ask John. What did he say?” If John were a true prophet who spoke the true words of God, then the chief priests, scribes, and elders had their answer. Jesus’ authority came from God.

But they’re not interested in answering his questions. They’re only interested in trapping him, and in order to do that, they have to escape his trap first.

That’s what they try to do in verses 5-6. Notice that they never discuss the actual question. They don’t huddle around and ask each other, “So, what do you think guys? Was John the Baptist from heaven or from man?” Instead, they only deliberate the consequences of different answers they could give. In verse 5 they realize that if they say John’s authority came from heaven, they would condemn themselves because they didn’t believe his testimony. But if they say his authority came from man, they would put their lives in danger because the people believed John was a prophet, and the Law required the people to execute someone who called a true prophet false. So they respond with the ultimate, timeless cop-out in verse 7: “we don’t know”.

They may have thought that they had escaped Jesus’ trap, but there was no avoiding this one. Even the answer “we don’t know” condemned them. How could the religious leaders of the city look at John the Baptist, the greatest prophet Israel had seen in centuries, and say “we don’t know where he came from”? They had shown that they were completely incompetent leaders. Their answer may have saved their skins, but it didn’t save their right to lead.

Jesus, of course, wasn’t buying it. Of course they knew where John came from. They knew he came from God. They knew he came bringing God’s message. They just didn’t want to hear it. So Jesus doesn’t waste his time trying to convince them that he also came from God and tells them in verse 8, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”

(3) **THE TENANTS**

Jesus knew, however, that the problem wasn’t just with the leaders. It was with the people. The people may have been on his side at the moment, but that was going to change soon enough. So Jesus tells a parable for all the people who are listening to him – the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, and the crowds – which leads to our third point: the Tenants.

Verse 9 says that Jesus began to tell “the people” this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while.” Who do these people stand for? The man in the parable stands for God, and the tenants stand for ethnic Israel. Another character is introduced in verse 10 – the servant. There are three servants in the parable. One in verse 10, the second in verse 11, and the third in verse 12. Together, they stand for God’s prophets. The owner sends his servants to the tenants just as God sent his prophets to Israel. Why? So that he might reap the fruit of their righteousness.

But Israel treated God’s prophets horribly. Elijah lamented that all God’s prophets had been murdered and that only he was left. Elijah was threatened with decapitation by his own king. Even Jeremiah, who wrote the prophecy about the destruction of the first Temple, was imprisoned and thrown into a well to die.

Again and again, Israel rejected God’s prophets, and that’s reflected in how the tenants treated the owner’s servants. They beat them, reject them, and do so with increasing brutality. The first servant in verse 10 is beaten and sent away empty-handed. The second servant in verse 11 is not only beaten but treated shamefully before he is sent away empty-handed. The third servant in verse 12 is “wounded and cast out.” Why are the tenants doing this? They know who the servants are. They know that they’re representatives of the vineyard’s owner. But that doesn’t stop them from violently mistreating them.

Their true motivations come out when the owner decides to try one more time. He wonders aloud in verse 13, “What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.” The tenants respond in verse 14: “But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’”

That’s why they mistreated the servants. They wanted the vineyard for themselves. They didn’t want the owner to get any of the fruit. They didn’t want to serve him with what rightfully belonged to him. They wanted it all for themselves, to live as if they were the owners and not mere tenants. So they throw the owner’s son out of the vineyard and kill him.

We know who the owner is. We know who the tenants are. We know who the servants are. But who is the son, the owner’s heir, and the rightful master of the vineyard? It’s Jesus. Jesus is the son whom the Father sent to the world to make one last appeal to his stubborn, stiff-necked people. But they won’t listen. They won’t give him what belongs to him. Instead, they will treat him worse than they treated any of the prophets before him as they murder him in cold blood.

Jesus is telling the scribes, chief priests, and elders that he knows exactly what they’re planning to do. He knows they’re planning to murder him, and he knows that they will succeed. The son will indeed be murdered, and the tenants will think that they finally have the vineyard for themselves. But oh how wrong they were. Who did they think they were, that they could sin so grievously and not suffer the consequences? They hadn’t sealed their victory by killing the son. They had sealed their condemnation, and now Jesus says in verse 16 that the owner himself “will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”

With the murder of the Son, God’s promises would no longer be focused on ethnic Israel. His covenant would no longer be exclusively with the Jews. Instead, it would extend to the Gentiles, the non-Jews of the world, because Israel had rejected the Lord for far too long.

The Jews understood what this meant, which is why verse 16 says, “When they heard this, they said, ‘Surely not!’” They’re in denial. They don’t think this will ever happen to them, but it will, because the Scriptures have said that it will. As Jesus looks directly at them in verse 17, he quotes Psalm 118:22, which says “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”

The tenants are going to reject the son, Israel is going to reject Jesus, and Jesus is going to reject Israel because the Lord foretold that it would happen. Jesus the stone would be rejected, but God would exalt him as the cornerstone, the stone that holds the entire structure together. And in verse 18, Jesus says that this exalted stone would be a stone of judgment. Those who fall on it will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him. It doesn’t matter how you fall on it. If you fall on the stone, you’re the one who breaks. If the stone falls on you, you’re still the one who breaks. In this collision between the rock and God’s rock-hearted people, the rock will win every time.

**CONCLUSION**

So what are we, as non-Jewish people supposed to take home from this? How does this apply to our lives? Let me suggest three things.

The first has to do with knowledge. This text helps us understand the connection between the Old Testament era and the New Testament era. In the Old Testament, God’s people were predominantly ethnic Jews. There were Gentile believers here and there, but they were quite rare. But now, in the New Testament era, which includes us, God’s people around the world are predominantly non-Jews. Why is that? Our text helps us understand that it’s because the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah and refused to acknowledge him as the Son of God. That’s why God now leases the vineyard of his covenant promises to Gentile believers like us. God still saves ethnic Jews, but they no longer receive the priority in God’s plans of redemption.

The second has to do with fear. We’re not just supposed to read a text on judgment like this and say, “Good thing that doesn’t describe me!” We’re supposed to read it with the sober realization that the people being judged could be *us*. If we reject Jesus like the Jews rejected him, then Jesus will reject us. The Jews couldn’t bank on their ethnic background for their salvation, and neither can we. We can’t say we’re saved from God’s judgment because we were born into Christian homes, or our ancestors were Christians to the third and fourth generations. Every person will be judged exclusively on the personal decisions they make. If you trust in Jesus, you will be saved. But if you don’t trust in Jesus, you will be condemned. As Romans 11:19-21 says,

“ ‘Then you will say, ‘Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in.’ That is true. They (the Jews) were broken off because of their unbelief, but you stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches (the Jews), neither will he spare you.”

Third, this text has to do with worship. This text is about God’s judgment, yes, but it’s also about God’s *kindness*. What God would keep sending his servants to appeal to his rebellious people after the first had been beaten and mistreated? What God would send his only Son to such a cruel, heartless people? Only a God of great mercy. And though the murder of the Son brought judgment on the Jews, it also brought salvation to the world. The stone that the builders rejected has indeed become the cornerstone, the stone that holds together the new Temple of God’s people. You, me, and everyone else who trusts in Christ are held together as the Temple of God through Christ our cornerstone. He lived, he died, and he was raised from the dead so that we could become God’s beloved people. So let us worship our great God of mercy.