



## **Matthew 23:37–39**

37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. 38 Look, your house is left to you desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

# Reflection

(Today's reflection is given by Justin Mof-fatt)

My passage today is a lament by Jesus over a city he loves. This is one of my all time favourite passages in Matthew's Gospel. I'm not sure why it's my favourite. On one level, it's so sad: Jerusalem has 'killed the prophets' and 'stoned those sent to you'. And more, her 'house will be left to you desolate'. The temple will be destroyed. It will be left desolate because she refused to listen to the 'one's sent', the prophets. It's pretty depressing.

So why do I like it? A number of reasons. The first reason I like it: it is 'lament'. It is a 'lamentation'. I find lament powerful. In-

stead of being tempted to contradict sin, injustice, pain, and suffering by simply saying ‘cheer up’ or ‘it’ll get better’ or ‘you’re being all negative’, lament not only feels the problem, it names the problem. Did you hear that? Lament not only feels the problem, but names it.

Feel the grief of Jesus: ‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem’. Or in the older translation: ‘O Jerusalem, Jerusalem’. Named not once, but twice. It has the sense of: “O my wonderful but troubled Jerusalem.” Like a parent to a wayward child.

With the feeling of grief comes the naming the sin: ‘you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you’. This, of course, is the tip of the iceberg; the indication that there is a problem with Jerusalem.

A powerful symptom. Do you want concrete proof that Jerusalem rejects God? They kill his prophets. The ones God sent. They stoned those sent to them. In other words, they didn't want to hear from God. They rejected his message.

A lament, felt and named. The second reason I like it: it comes from a place of love.

37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.”

How often I have longed! I have desired you! For a long time! I wanted to do this: to gather you under my wing. Like a moth-

er hen with her vulnerable chicks. Jesus is the mother hen here. And Israel are the chicks. Think about the beauty of such an image. Such care and love.

The third reason I like it: it sums up the history of Israel. It is a summary of the Old Testament. Israel is that close to God: under the shadow of the wings of the Almighty; the desire of nations. 'My son.' (Hosea 11). "My treasured possession" (Deuteronomy 7). A 'Kingdom of Priests' (Exodus 19). A 'light to the world' (Isaiah 49). They are 'chicks' belonging to a 'hen'. They belong to Jesus. And yet Israel, like us, has a stubborn heart. They didn't want to hear from God. They didn't want to yield their wills to God. So they edited God out.

And yet God still loved them. See what Je-

Jesus is saying here? I love you, and I want to shelter you. I really do. But you were not willing. That is the history of Israel. And yet...

The fourth reason I like it: It explains the gospel. The picture Jesus is leaving us with is not only the beauty of the love of a hen over her chicks, but also of protection from danger.

There are examples of hens going into a chicken coop on fire to rescue their chicks. I've been told that there are even examples of hens protecting their chickens from fire by dying themselves, and, as the fire goes out, the chicks come out from under her wings alive. Tom Wright points out in his commentary that Jesus is here to do just that: to take the heat of God's justice

on the cross so as to save the chicks. He longs to do so, to protect and to save us. This is the Gospel.

And the last reason: And yet a choice is being offered.

“You were not willing.”

You didn't want my love. You didn't think you needed my protection; my wings. If you did, you would have been more receptive to my prophets, to me and to my message. But you resisted the negative news (about yourself), so you can't have the good news (about me).

“You were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.”

The temple will be destroyed. Jesus will go on and talk about that next up. And it was destroyed in 70AD by the Romans. And with it, the hope that salvation would come from that temple. Fire will take it down. There is a sense in which the whole world has been set on fire by sin!

No. Salvation now comes from another temple: that one that was torn down in three days, and was raised with the resurrection of Jesus. Salvation comes from the body of Jesus on the cross.

But – to those who trust, you will be blessed.

39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the



Lord.”

Vindication will come in his return. But for now, he will go to his death.

Choose him.

## **Think**

Am I under his wings? Or assuming I will provide my own protection?

Am I ‘in Christ’, protected from the fire of my own sin and the appropriate wrath that is directed towards it. Do I know his lament over the sin my life?

## **Pray**

First – thank Jesus that he cares. He could have not cared. He could have lit a match to this whole stinking world and watched

it go ka-boom. He could have got a bowl of popcorn and watched us burn the world to a cinder. But he cared. He did something. Thank him.

Second – pray that you can join his process of lamentation: to feel and name the grief, in your life and in the world. The problem with Israel is that she had plenty to lament over, and numerous calls to lament, but she was stubborn. She used contraction as a way to handle the sin. ‘Things aren’t that bad.’ Etc. Don’t join them. Join Jesus.

Third – pray that you are part of those people who are saying: ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’ Be one who cries ‘Come, Lord.’ Ask God to give you a thirst for his coming. A thirst that shapes your life now. And be thankful.