

# **LUKE**

## Part 56: “O Jerusalem”

Luke 13:31-35

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Sunday, March 24, 2019 (The Third Sunday of Lent)

### **Scripture Reading**

<sup>31</sup> At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” <sup>32</sup> And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox,<sup>1</sup> ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day<sup>2</sup> I finish my course. <sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.’ <sup>34</sup> O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! <sup>35</sup> Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ”<sup>3</sup>

*Heavenly Father, your word reveals you are a God who desires to dwell with his people. So today, as we humble our minds and our hearts before your word, we also welcome your Holy Spirit to come and move in and among us. May our hearts find our center, our identity, and our hope in you. We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus Christ our Savior, AMEN.*

### **Introduction**

The Pharisees are tired of Jesus.

In the last few episodes in the gospel of Luke, they have tried to assert their authority over Jesus only to be publically corrected and embarrassed by Jesus.

They are very much like, “Okay, Jesus, I think it is time to go. Why don’t you travel onto a different region now.” The Pharisees, however, are masters in passivity. They don’t politely ask Jesus to leave or kick him out of their cities. Instead, they say that Herod is

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<sup>1</sup> “In rabbinic literature the fox was typical of low cunning (Ber. 61b, citing R. Akiba; SB II, 200f.), but it was also portrayed as an insignificant creature in comparison with the lion: ‘Be first in greeting every man; and be a tail to lions and be not a head to foxes’ (P. Ab. 4:15).” I. Howard Marshall, [\*The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text\*](#), New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 571.

<sup>2</sup> “No careful reader of Luke’s gospel could miss the echoes, backwards and forwards: to the boy Jesus, found on the third day in the Temple (2:46); to the risen Jesus, alive again on the third day (24:21).” Tom Wright, [\*Luke for Everyone\*](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 173.

<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 13:31–35.

mad and that he wants to kill Jesus. There is a history behind this statement, and there is a reason they would use this particular threat to motivate Jesus to move on.

Herod Antipas's father – Herod the Great (same name, same family, different man) – was the one who murdered all the infants and toddlers in Bethlehem because he heard the Messiah was born there (Mt. 2:16-18). Jesus narrowly escaped this infanticide, because God had warned Joseph (Jesus's earthly father) to flee with his family to Egypt (Mt. 2:13-15).

More recently, Herod Antipas (the Herod referred to in this passage) has murdered John the Baptist because he didn't like how John publically exposed his sin through his preaching (Mt. 14:1-12). Herod is dangerous, but he is a decoy that would tempt Jesus and the reader to be distracted from the main point.

The main point of this text is *Jerusalem* – which is mentioned three times in a mere five verses. Jesus isn't scared of Herod one bit. But the reason for Jesus's fearlessness would have been shocking to anyone listening to Jesus at this moment. People would expect Jesus to be fearless because he is a great man of God who has been sent for a purpose. He can't die because he is the Messiah – the promised, anointed king who would bring about the kingdom of God!

However, this isn't Jesus's reasoning. Jesus isn't scared of dying now because he knows he must die later. More specifically, Jesus knows that he must die in the city of Jerusalem, which is why verse 33 says, he “*must (δεῖ)* go on [his] way.” Jesus is fully aware that each step he takes toward the Holy City is a step toward the cross.

This text shows us just how crucial the city of Jerusalem is to the story of the gospel. Even in a passage as short as this one, we can see that this city is unique as an object of God's attention, God's love, God's concern, God's judgment, and God's lamentation.

So what I would like to do is with the rest of our time today is to zoom out a little bit and examine the importance of Jerusalem in the story of the Bible as a whole, and why it should matter to us today. So we will organize our discussion under three headings: **1.) Jerusalem Past, 2.) Jerusalem Present, and 3.) Jerusalem Future.**

## **Exposition**

### **1.) Jerusalem Past.**

In order to fully understand this passage in Luke, we need to ask the question: why is Jesus going to Jerusalem? For the last several chapters he has been on a journey to Jerusalem to die. But why does it matter *where* he dies?

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<sup>4</sup> “**under necessity of happening, it is necessary, one must, one has to**, denoting compulsion of any kind.” William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 213–214.

There are two answers to this question. Jesus must go to Jerusalem for its significance related to the history of God's people. And Jesus must go to Jerusalem for its significance related to the worship of God's people.

So the first thing you need to know is that the city of Jerusalem appears all throughout Scripture. Jerusalem pops up in Genesis (which is the first book of the Bible), Jerusalem pops up in Revelation (which is the last book of the Bible), and it plays a significant role for many of the books that are in the middle of your Bible.

The first time we see Jerusalem is in a tiny reference in the book of Genesis to a man named Melchizedek, who is the King of Salem (which was an ancient name of Jerusalem that means "peace") (Gen. 14:18-20). We don't know much about Melchizedek at all other than he is a priest of God, an ancient king of Jerusalem, and his name means "king of righteousness."

Fast forward, to Genesis 22. Abraham takes his son Isaac to be sacrificed to God, but while he is on the mountain of Moriah (Gen. 22:2), God provides a ram to be a substitutionary sacrifice in place of his son (Gen. 22:13-14). And where are the mountains of Moriah? Right outside of Jerusalem.

So, just to back up, we are not even through the book of Genesis yet, and look at all that Jerusalem represents. It is the city of the king of righteousness, the king of peace, and the king who is a priest. It is the city where God provides a substitutionary sacrifice that leads to life and blessing of God's people.

Isn't this amazing?

I want you to see that thousands of years, before Jesus was even born, Jerusalem was set aside as the theater where the greatest acts of redemption would take place. This is the place where the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus would happen. This is where the first 120 Christians would be filled with the Spirit of God and sent out to declare the gospel. This is a big deal because it means that the gospel wasn't just an afterthought. This was God's plan from the foundation of the world.

This is the significance of Jerusalem for the history of God's people.

Secondly, Jerusalem also played a very practical purpose in centering the worship of God. Under the leadership of King David, Jerusalem became the political capital of the Kingdom of Israel (2 Sam. 5:1-12). And under King Solomon's leadership, Jerusalem became the city that housed the Temple of God – the very place where God's presence dwelt on earth (1 Kings 8)! This meant that no matter where you lived in Israel, you were to come to Jerusalem if you wanted to worship the living God.

In fact, according to the Law of Moses, if you were a Jewish male, you were required to make a pilgrimage three times a year to come and worship at the temple for certain religious festivals: ***“Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the***

*Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Booths. They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed” (Deuteronomy 16:16, ESV).*

Many times it wasn't just the male who would come to worship either. Entire families would travel hundreds of miles to worship. We saw this earlier in the gospel of Luke when Jesus's family went to Jerusalem for a festival when he was a child (Lk. 2:41-52).

As they would travel they would sing songs together like Psalm 122: *“I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the LORD!” Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem! Jerusalem—built as a city that is bound firmly together, to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD” (Psalm 122:1–4, ESV).*

And by the way, these festivals were not just random events. They were not activities of religious busy work; as if people just needed something to do because smartphones weren't invented yet. These festivals reminded Israel of their identity as God's people. It reminded them of their story. They reminded Israel that their lives were designed to be centered on the worship of God and nothing else.

And this you can see how we need to apply some of this today, right? How often is our culture and the world trying to tell us and sell an identity and a story that is not the gospel?

We need to know that *to be the people of God means that we are to be a people centered on the worship of God.* Corporate worship is not to be viewed as an optional add-on for the days that we feel like worship is convenient. *Corporate worship is important because it recalibrates us. It serves to remind us of our truest identity because it reminds us of the story in which our lives exist. The death and resurrection of Jesus, the filling of the Holy Spirit, the coming of God's kingdom all of which are told through the corporate worship remind us we are a forgiven people, a sent people, and an expectant people.*

## **2.) Jerusalem Present.**

It is obvious from our reading in Luke that Jesus cares for Jerusalem. It is a place of his attention and affection.

So we might ask, how should Christians look at the city of Jerusalem today? After all, even today, Jerusalem is a very important and holy city for Jews, for Christians, and many other people in the world.

With this said, it is very important to realize that Jerusalem does not and cannot play the exact same role that it played in Old Testament times. Something significant has changed. What has changed? Two things: Jesus has died and risen again. The veil that separated God's presence from God's people in the temple was torn when Jesus died (Mt. 27:51). God no longer dwells in a temple in Jerusalem. More than that, the temple

was destroyed in A.D. 70, so we couldn't worship God in the Jerusalem temple even if we tried.

However, Jews and some Christians long for the temple to be rebuilt. Is this something the Bible calls for?

On this point, I believe the author of the book of Hebrews has much to say. *The simple answer is this: because of Jesus, we do not need the temple any more to worship God.* The whole sacrificial system of the Law was fulfilled in Christ. As the book of Hebrews tells us, Jesus is our true temple, our true priest, and our true sacrifice. No more sacrifices need to be made or should be made for our sins because the cross is more powerful than the blood of animals. We do not need to look to the shadows anymore, because the reality has come!

But this provokes a huge theological question for people: what should our view be of the modern city of Jerusalem and the modern state of Israel at large?

Here I believe there are two equally opposite errors: the error of "Israel doesn't matter"; and the error of "nothing matters but Israel." In other words, there is the error of extreme-replacement theology (i.e., God hates Jewish people, and they are the enemy of Christians), or an unhealthy idolatry of Israel (i.e., wherein we are more passionate about Israel and loyal to Israel than we are to Jesus).

*If we have a low view of Israel, you will not be able to appreciate the beauty of the Gospel fully. The story of Israel – the kings, the priests, the prophets, the sacrifices, the temple, the kingdom – all give us categories to understand who Jesus is and what he has accomplished.*

*If you have an idolatrous a view of Israel, you too have not appreciated the beauty of the Gospel. If you trust in Jesus for your salvation, you are now part of God's people. No matter your ethnic or racial background, you are now a part of what the Apostle Paul calls "the Israel of God" in Galatians 6:16. You are what the Apostles Peter refers to as "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own possession" (1 Pt. 2:9).*

For those who believe in Jesus, there is neither Jew nor Gentile because we are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28). If you are Gentile who believes in Jesus, you have been grafted into the covenant people of God (Rom. 11). In other words, Israel has not ceased to exist – rather, it has expanded.

There is certainly a biblical middle ground where we can affirm that Jerusalem is very important, but it is no longer the dwelling place of God, nor are the Jews now the only people of God. *Because of Jesus, God no longer dwells in a temple; he dwells in his people. Because of Jesus, God has opened the door of salvation people from all nations! Because of Jesus, God's presence God is not contained to one city or to one people group anymore.*

*To put a very complex matter very simply: Father Abraham had many sons. Many sons had father Abraham. I am one of them, and so are you.*

### **3.) Jerusalem Future.**

When you read the Old Testament prophets, they begin to talk about this idea called New Jerusalem (Ezek. 40-48). In a book like Ezekiel, for example, the New Jerusalem is a vision of ultimate restoration and renewal. Fast forward to the prophetic literature of the New Testament; this New Jerusalem takes on a dimension of crucial importance. It is the image of the ultimate hope of the Bible.

In fact, what is called “new Jerusalem” is the governing metaphor for the promise that God will dwell with his people in unbroken, perfect union: *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away”* (Revelation 21:1–4, ESV).

*You could argue that the message of the Bible – from Eden to Exile; from Israel to the Church; from cross to empty grave; Creation to New Creation – is that God will dwell with his people.*

But too often our hearts fail to rejoice in this hope properly. Too often we fail to set our eyes upon the hope that has been promised to us in the word of God. John Calvin taught that cultivating eternal hope in our hearts or “meditation on the future life” was a spiritual discipline on par with reading the Bible and praying.<sup>5</sup> So how are you practicing the spiritual discipline of hope? How can you cultivate this hope, the hope of New Jerusalem? How can you set your hope on New Jerusalem instead of your circumstances?

### **Conclusion**

Once, I was asked by a member of our congregation about what I thought about Jerusalem.

After a lengthy discussion, that included much of the concepts we have discussed today, I concluded with the words of Psalm 87, which is another song about Jerusalem. I’ll read it to you now: *“On the holy mount stands the city he founded; the LORD loves the gates*

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<sup>5</sup> Tim Chester. *You Can Change: God’s Transforming Power for our Sinful behavior and Negative Emotions*. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 148

*of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon; behold, Philistia and Tyre, with Cush— ‘This one was born there,’ they say. And of Zion it shall be said, ‘This one and that one were born in her’; for the Most High himself will establish her. The LORD records as he registers the peoples, ‘This one was born there.’ Singers and dancers alike say, ‘All my springs are in you’” (Psalm 87:1–7, ESV).*

The fascinating claim of this psalm is that it prophesies that it will be said of people who are a part of nations that are by nature the enemies of Israel, that they were born in Zion; that is, Jerusalem. How can this be?

It is because Jerusalem is where Jesus died, and more importantly, where Jesus rose again. So now, even if you were a gentile (which is most of this room), no matter what your past is, no matter your background or story – the beginning and end of your story is Jerusalem. If you believe in Jesus, your spiritual birth certificate now says Jerusalem.

*This is your truth: **You were born where Jesus died.***

So what is Jerusalem? Jerusalem is our true home, our true destiny, our true city, whose designer and builder is God (Heb. 11:10).

*So then Redeemer, let us come to before Zion, before the heavenly Jerusalem. May we center our lives on worship the worship of our God, remembering we are his people and a part of his story. May we understand who we are as the dwelling place of the Spirit of God, and may our hearts awaken to the hope of New Jerusalem, of the New Heavens and New Earth, of New Creation when we will for all eternity be God’s people, and he will be our God.*

AMEN.

### **Community Group Discussion Starters**

- 1) *Read Luke 13:31-35 and summarize this passage in your own words.*
- 2) *This passage shows the importance of the city of Jerusalem. What are some of the important biblical events that have happened in or near the city of Jerusalem?*
- 3) *During the times of the Old Testament, Jerusalem was central to the lives of God’s people because Jerusalem was the place where God was worshipped at his temple. In the same way, how should worship frame the life of the believer today? What role does worship play in forming our identity as God’s people?*
- 4) *What is the hope of the New Jerusalem found in Revelation 21:1-4? How should we encourage and nurture this hope in our hearts?*

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