

In Nomine Iesu

The Tenth Sunday after Trinity 2022

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder – Luke 19:41-48

Now as Jesus drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, “If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. “For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation.” Then He went into the temple and began to drive out those who bought and sold in it, saying to them, “It is written, ‘My house is a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’” And He was teaching daily in the temple. But the chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people sought to destroy Him, and were unable to do anything; for all the people were very attentive to hear Him.

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Temple who was destroyed and then raised up in three days. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

There are many famous cities in the world. For example, London and New York are famous for their wealth and cultural influence. Athens and Rome are famous for their great age and heritage. Seattle and Rio De Janeiro are famous for their sheer beauty. Jerusalem possessed all three of these attributes. What is more it was the center of a religion whose influence extended far beyond Israel’s borders. Religion permeated everything in Jerusalem in ancient times. Her rhythm of life was determined by the rites of the temple that rose skyward from the highest part of the city. Jerusalem was a city of prophets, priests, and kings. The music of King David’s psalms echoed with haunting beauty throughout her twisting streets and lanes. She was in a league of her own. Wealth and wisdom and beauty were hers.

I

From the Roman general and historian, Josephus, who witnessed her destruction, we get a glimpse of the beauty and glory of Jerusalem’s temple. He wrote, “Now the front, outward face of the temple lacked nothing that was likely to surprise either men's minds or their eyes; for it was covered entirely with plates of gold of great weight, and, at the first rising of the sun, reflected back a very fiery splendor and made those who forced themselves to look upon it to turn their eyes away, just as they would have done at the sun’s own rays. But the temple appeared to travelers like a mountain covered with snow when they were coming to it at a distance; for those parts of it that were not gilt were exceedingly white.” (Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, V, 5)

We can only imagine how, in 70 A.D., Jerusalem’s many admirers must have gasped in open-mouthed horror as they heard that this great and glorious city had been besieged, sacked, and utterly devastated by the Romans, just as the Galilean carpenter’s son said only days before Israel’s spiritual leaders joined hands with the hated Roman governor to crucify Him. Why had God allowed it to happen? Was it because Jerusalem flaunted an immorality that would make ancient Corinth or modern San Francisco blush? Or was it because she was more filled with crime and violence than Chicago? Or was it because she made Las Vegas look honest and respectable? No, Jerusalem was like a stunningly beautiful woman in church, every hair in place, dressed in fashionable yet appropriate apparel and fine jewelry, singing with a lovely and seemingly devout voice, while in reality she was consumed with herself, reveling in the worshipful glances she drew from

those around her. Dazzlingly attractive on the outside, she was filled with so much that is unlovely inside. This city to whom God had given so much, rejected Him, His grace, and His only-begotten Son. The grace of God just didn't suit her image of herself. Jerusalem the wealthy, the awe-inspiring, and the beautiful was destroyed not because she broke the Law of God - **for all cities do that!** - but because she despised the Gospel.

Jesus wept over her whom He loved, but not even His fervent tears could moisten and soften the dry hardness of her heart. Yes, He entered her gates greeted by many as her Savior and King, but her nobles and leaders sought to make Him a criminal and execute Him. He cleansed her temple, but its clergy and hangers-on proceeded to foul it almost immediately again with deceit, thievery, and hypocrisy. He taught her ordinary people – so many eager to hear the truth! - only to have her priests and scribes becloud, dispute, and contradict everything He said. Yes, Jerusalem for all her outward beauty, stature, and wonder got what she truly deserved. That is the awful truth Jesus wept over.

But if it is true that Jerusalem reaped what she had sown, why hasn't Tacoma as well? Jerusalem has nothing on us. We are not free of sin, hypocrisy, foolishness, and self-deception. We do not always gladly hear and learn the word of God. We have in times of temptation and conflict chosen **our own proud Barabbas** when **Christ and His humility** did not suit our image of ourselves or got in the way of what we wanted. Dear friends, if Jerusalem got what she deserved from a just and holy God for her very real sins, should we expect anything different when the day of judgment arrives for us?

II

Jesus said to Jerusalem, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." (v. 42) We **hear** Jesus' words and we **look** for what there is to see that **Jerusalem did not see**. But that is just the point. The things that make for peace between God and man, whether two thousand years ago or now, are not the things seen, but believed! What was Jerusalem's problem? Simply put, she trusted in her own goodness rather than the goodness of God. She looked in the mirror of God's Law and saw only her beauty. She saw not what she truly was, but what she wanted to be true about herself. She **heard** the good news that the Savior God had appointed for her had now come, but all she **saw** was a carpenter's Son - a Galilean! - one who was not educated **as she deemed proper for a prophet, priest, or king**. She saw only His lowliness. She distastefully noted fishermen, sinners, and tax collectors gathered around Him. Jerusalem wanted a glorious king, one who was a suitable consort for a city so beautiful, but she saw in the Galilean carpenter's son only an embarrassment, an annoyance, an unsuitable sacrificial lamb in need of killing.

There was nothing wrong with Jerusalem's eyesight. She saw all too well. After all she had crafted the glory of God's temple with her own hands, having a real eye for beauty, as Josephus noted. But whose glory was on display? What were strangers meant to see in the fiery, golden glow of this second temple that King Herod had taken over and remodeled into great beauty? Herod's was an astoundingly successful makeover, as it should have been, for it took 82 years to complete. The temple was indeed exquisitely beautiful to the eye. But beauty, as we all should know, is fleeting. Herod's temple was finally finished in 63 A.D., 30 years or so after the annoying Lamb had been sacrificed. Yet it would stand as completed for only seven years.

Dear friends, to **see** the glorious beauty of Jerusalem's temple saved no one. For seeing does not save, faith does, faith in the unseen God of grace who first put His name on this city and commanded that His temple be built on this spot **to give testimony to the One who would come** and Himself be the enduring temple, the eternal High Priest, the

sacrificial Lamb that would be offered once for the sins of Jerusalem, of Israel, of all the cities of the world, of all the nations of the earth, for all people of all time, for you, and for me. Dear friends, faith does **not** come by **seeing**. **Faith comes by hearing, hearing the word of God.** Only then **can God-given faith see** what God has done, is doing, and promises to do always. Those are the things that made for the peace of Jerusalem, and still make for our peace.

God's word says in another place, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the **evidence of things not seen**. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony ... by faith [Abraham] dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; **for he waited for the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.**" (Hebrews 11:1-2, 9) Believers of every age, both in the time of the Old and New Testaments, were and are all children of faithful Abraham. They look not to God's law for comfort, for there they see only the truth of their own shame and sin. No, they look to the gospel, where they see the Savior who **once was promised**, and **now has come into the world** to save the ugly and sinful. They see not an annoying carpenter's son, but the Lamb of God who by His death took all their sins away. To Him alone they look for the things that make for peace.

It is instructive to note that **the name Jerusalem** appears 809 times in the Bible. You will look in vain through the first 805 for a description of Jerusalem that speaks of her great physical beauty! Why? Because in those 805 verses we are told not what man could see in Jerusalem, but what God saw in her. But the 806th occurrence is different. Here we are told what a man saw with his own eyes: "Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband ... having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal ..." (Revelation 21:2,11) Wait, you might say, that is the heavenly Jerusalem, the Jerusalem that will be, not the Jerusalem that was, not the Jerusalem in which the Lamb of God was condemned and crucified.

Yes, that is true. Yet it is also the Jerusalem that was, the city Abraham longed for, the city with foundations that will last and not fade away. **It is the city whose beauty the eye cannot see, for only faith can know it.** It is the city of which the sons of Korah, the psalmists, sang: "Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is **Mount Zion** on the sides of the north, the city of the Great King. God is in her palaces; He is known as her refuge ... **As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the LORD of hosts**, in the city of our God: God will establish her forever." (Psalm 48:1-3, 8) This is the city that those "**very attentive**" to Jesus in the temple courtyard longed for.

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The city the psalmists saw by faith, the city they confessed to all who hear the words of the psalm they chanted, was the city whose heart and center, whose temple is Christ, the Lamb of God. He supplies her with all wealth and wisdom and beauty. He is her great King, her wise Prophet, and her faithful Priest. And **He is the same yesterday, today and forever**. In Him faithful Jerusalem trusts, and to her He gives beauty that lasts forever and ever. Beauty, as they say, is in the eye of the beholder. **Hear then, dear Christian, and behold the city of God, and in her midst Him who covers her with the beauty of His own righteousness! Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria

S. R. Sparley, Parkland, 21 August 2022