

In the Bible, there are only two times where Jesus is recorded as weeping. The one that's probably the more well-known is where He weeps at Lazarus' tomb. It's sort of Bible trivia, as the shortest verse in the Bible.

The other time is here in our Gospel text. "And when He drew near and saw the city, He wept over it." This is taking place on Palm Sunday. The crowds gathered around are rejoicing and praising God – and Jesus is weeping. Why is that? Jesus is weeping because two things are coming together – His judgment and His love.

Jesus weeps, because He knows the judgment that is coming to Jerusalem. He foretells it with great specificity: "For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you."

His words would be fulfilled roughly forty years later, in the year AD. 70. The Jews would rise up against the Roman Empire, and the Romans would come in great force, laying siege to Jerusalem and finally taking it. We have records of this from an historian named Josephus, and what he records is brutal.

Groups within Jerusalem fought each other, murdering one another and burning each other's food supplies. As the siege progressed, the starving inhabitants resorted to eating dung and even cannibalizing their own children. Eventually, a fire broke out, consuming much of the city and lighting the temple on fire. Finally, the Romans breached the last defenses, slaughtering thousands and hauling many others away into slavery.

The city was leveled; its walls disassembled stone by stone, just as Jesus had said. And of the magnificent temple, nothing remained, save some of its treasures that were hauled away to be featured in the victory parade in Rome. The city of David was a smoldering ruin, and those people descended from Abraham were either lying dead in the rubble or being hauled away in chains.

Such was the judgment of God against the city and the people. Why did such judgment come? Christ says, speaking to the city, "because you did not know the time of your visitation."

The city of Jerusalem had received many visits from God and His messengers. In the Old Testament, many prophets were sent to the city to speak God's word to its rulers and its inhabitants. God Himself came to dwell in the temple in Jerusalem.

Yet over time, the people ignored God's word and listened to the words of false prophets instead. They turned the temple into an idol, thinking that they could do whatever they wanted and they'd be fine, because God would never allow the temple to be destroyed.

But in a scene not all that different from what the Romans would do in the year 70, the Babylonians came, sent by God as His agents of judgment, and destroyed the city, massacred and enslaved the people, and leveled the temple. The city had ignored the visitation of the prophets, and so God's judgment arrived as He had declared.

Now Christ comes to the city. He has been there several times previously. He taught in the temple when He was still a child. He came for various feasts and festivals, working numerous miracles and teaching about the Kingdom of God. He spoke to rebuke the false teachers of the temple, to bring the people back to the truth of the Scriptures.

And now He comes for the last time, the final week of His earthly ministry, which will end with Him hanging on the cross outside the city. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come to be the once-for-all peace offering, to shed His blood to bring peace between mankind and God, and the city will reject Him.

Christ is there to fulfill the Old Testament. He comes to bring to fruition God's plan of salvation. He is the long-awaited Messiah, the promised seed of Abraham, the whole reason for God sustaining the people of Israel. He is the love of God in human flesh, sent out of love to save. He is that which makes for peace. And they do not know Him.

The city with the word "peace" in its name – the "salem" of "Jerusalem" – refuses God's offer of peace. Its priests and scribes and leading men, those who should be at the gates, leading the people in praise, escorting the Son of God to His temple, instead hide in that temple, using it like robbers hiding in a den, scheming how they might destroy Him.

They had hardened their hearts and blinded their spiritual eyes, and so the things which make for peace are hidden from them. They have secured their judgment, and it will come. And so, Jesus weeps.

This should serve as a warning to us, and to all people. God's judgment isn't just some Bible-times thing that doesn't happen anymore. God is patient, but He is also just and therefore cannot ignore sin or let it go.

His most common punishment on sin, the punishment that is in fact common to all men, is death. The Bible tells us that the wages of sin is death, and as all sin and fall short of the glory of God, all will die. Moreover, those who die apart from faith in Christ will face eternity in hell. There, every single good thing is stripped away, leaving one in physical, emotional, and spiritual torment forever.

God's judgment isn't only seen in death, however. And it isn't something that only happens on an individual level, either. God's judgment still comes against nations and peoples, like it came against the Jews in the first century AD. When people reject Him and set up their own false gods, He will come in judgment. This is especially true where people try to hide their sins under the veil of right, or the name "Christian."

I'm convinced that COVID-19 was an example of this. Our country was so proud, so powerful, so untouchable – we thought.

Our economy was booming; the god of wealth and materialism seemed to be giving us many blessings. We chased after the gods of entertainment and pleasure, satisfying our urges and turning a blind eye to things that were wrong as long as others turned a blind eye to ours. And if there were any

problems, well, science, that great god, could solve them. Spend enough money, do enough research, and any problem can be solved.

And all the while we often pretended that we were a “Christian” country, or at least governed by “Judeo-Christian” values – whatever that meant.

And then came AD 2020. And our economy crashed. And all our entertainment was shut down. And our rulers spent more time blaming each other than helping the citizens. And our citizens hoarded supplies and rioted and look upon one another with fear. And our scientists couldn’t give answers and had to silence the scientific process and open discussion to maintain the appearance of competency. And a lot of people died. There went the idols.

Yet for Christians, it was even worse. And not because of the persecution that came, though it did. Rather, the judgment came in the exposure of how quickly Christians folded to that persecution.

Churches shut down across the nation because the health officials said to, and very few voices responded and asked if the government actually has the authority to close down the house of God.

Governors and judges and all manner of people told Christians they weren’t permitted to receive the body and blood of Christ except in government-approved ways, or that they couldn’t bury their loved ones and hear the promises of the Resurrection in a Christian funeral, or that they couldn’t sing Christ’s praises because someone decided on a shred of vague “evidence” that singing would kill everyone – nevermind that God commands His people to do so in His word.

Pastors and family members were forbidden from visiting their loved ones in nursing homes, starving residents of love and of God’s gifts of Word and Sacrament, and in response many pastors and family members grumbled and then threw up their hands and figured, “Well at least they’re getting their blood pressure pills regularly” as their souls withered in isolation.

When we look back on that time as the Christian Church, do we recognize what went on? In the terms of our reading, did we know the time of our visitation? To tie into last week, did we realize what was truly important – the things of God – and like the manager shrewdly put them before the things of this life? Or are we like those Jeremiah speaks of: “no man relents of his evil, saying, ‘What have I done?’”

Now you might be tempted to think, “Pastor, why are you bringing this whole COVID thing back up? That was three years ago! We’ve moved on to other issues!” If I’m honest, I wondered the same thing when I was writing this sermon. Is this an outdated example?

Then the thought hit me: it was forty years between when Christ spoke these words about Jerusalem and when they were fulfilled. Forty years – more than a generation! Do you think anybody in Jerusalem remembered what that Jesus guy had said forty years earlier? Or had they moved on?

Did people figure that, when the judgment didn’t happen right after Christ said it, then His words must not have been true? In fact, when the Roman armies showed up, sent by God to bring about the judgment, had the people of Jerusalem convinced themselves that they were doing what was right, fighting against these godless pagans, preserving the purity of their nation... even as they had hardened themselves against the preaching of those annoying Christians and had driven most of them out of Jerusalem?

Do we think we've moved on? Is it back to business as usual? Are we back to trusting in our money to get us security, in our government to provide for us, in our entertainment to give us satisfaction, in our science to give us the answers to life's problems?

Or do we think we've solved all the problems, that we've put all our money into gold and we're going to get the right guy elected and we've taken up hobbies that you can do while quarantined and we're going to read all the studies and only use herbal meds from here on out, and so we're good?

The thing is, none of those are the things that make for peace, as Jesus says. Only repentance and faith, only throwing out the idols and drawing closer to Christ, will preserve us from the judgment that is to come.

It doesn't matter if your money is in the bank, in real estate, or in your mattress if you aren't valuing first and foremost the treasures in heaven. It doesn't matter who is in authority writing the laws and regulations if you aren't hearing the word of the King of Kings. It doesn't matter what you do for entertainment or relaxation if you are putting it above receiving the gifts of God. And it doesn't matter what choices you are making for your medical care if you are not regularly receiving the Sacrament, which our fathers in the faith called "The Medicine of Immortality."

None of these earthly things are the things that make for peace. Only Christ – He is our peace.

And Christ earnestly desires to give this peace. He is not a God who rejoices when He sends judgment upon the earth. No, He weeps. He weeps, because He desires that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.

Earlier in Luke's Gospel, Jesus speaks these words over the city: "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!"

He, the Lord, had sent prophet after prophet to call His people back to Him. And still, even as He enters into that city for the last time, He still calls. What does He do when He gets into Jerusalem? He enters the temple and drives out those desecrating it, those using it to hide their unrighteousness as robbers hiding in a den.

And having cleansed the temple, He then begins teaching, and teaching every day! Jesus doesn't enter the city and just mope about, or withdraw in angry sullenness. No, He goes into this city and starts teaching!

He goes, as all the prophets He has sent before, to gather the people to Himself through His words. He goes, despite the fact that many in the city are seeking to destroy Him. He goes, knowing that, as the prophets sent to Jerusalem were often killed, He will be tortured and then led out of the city to be crucified.

Our Lord weeps over Jerusalem because He loves her people. He loves them such that He goes willingly to be the Passover sacrifice for them, and for the whole world. Just as He promised Abraham centuries earlier that He would spare Sodom and Gomorrah if only ten righteous people were found there, He teaches in the temple and gives His word of promise that any who believe on Him will be spared from eternal destruction and given His peace.

The Lord still speaks those words of promise today. Though we sin against Him over and over again, still He comes to us here in His Service and grants us forgiveness, and then teaches us from His holy word.

He still acts to take away our idols and cleanse our hearts as He did the temple, sometimes forcing away those things we won't voluntarily give up, so that our hearts would hang on His words, like the crowds did. Our Lord does this for us because He loves us and desires that we not fall into the judgment that is coming.

This is true not only for us Christians, but for all the world. The Lord desires all people, all the people of Rawlins, all the people of the United States of America, all the people of the world to be saved.

And so He sends forth His Church into the world, to do as He did, to speak His words to all people, to give forth the things which make for peace. We are to baptize in His name, that hearts might be cleansed from sin and idols. We are called to proclaim His Gospel to the world, to share the Good News that Jesus Christ has died to save sinners from death and bring them everlasting life through faith in Him. The Church is in the world to teach the will of God, that men might know what it is that makes for peace, both peace with God and peace with men.

The world by and large will not want to hear this, just as Jerusalem ignored the prophets and even Christ. But despite this rejection, the Lord still loves the world and sends forth His word, that even a few might be saved from the judgment.

The world will hate this, and often its leaders and its governments and its mobs will seek to destroy the Church, just as the leaders of Jerusalem sought to destroy Christ as He taught in the temple.

Sometimes they will forbid the Church from gathering together or require Christians to speak or act in ways that are contrary to God's will. Sometimes they will try to deceive, twisting God's word in an effort to turn the Church against herself. And sometimes they will bring outright violence against the people of God, as they did to the prophets, apostles, and Christ Himself. The wicked have been shedding the blood of the righteous since Cain killed Abel, and it won't stop until Christ comes again in glory.

Yet our Lord is still in control. He will not permit His Christians to suffer or be killed until the time He has chosen. Jesus sat in the temple, and despite the authorities desperately wanting Him dead, they couldn't touch Him. His hour had not yet come.

The Lord defends His people and will not let the evil one touch them except as He allows. You can have absolute confidence that, as you speak the words through which the Lord offers peace, the Lord Himself is protecting you.

And so, speak. Don't wait until weeping comes and judgment has been made visible. Speak, and trust that the Lord who loves all people will work through His word. For He and He alone is the One who makes for peace.

In His holy name, amen.