

Jesus Laments

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[0 : 00] Jerusalem, you were not willing. Let me read you a quote. The poor are left to Providence's care.

They prowl like other animals along the shores to pick up limpets and other shellfish, the casual repasts of hundreds during part of the year in these unhappy islands.

Hundreds thus annually drag through the season a wretched life, and numbers unknown in all parts of the western highlands fall beneath the pressure.

Some of hunger, more of the putrid fever, the epidemic of the coasts originating from unwholesome food, the dire effects of necessity.

Thus wrote an English gentleman upon visiting the western highlands soon after the Battle of Culloden in 1746. The highlands of Scotland had lost thousands of their menfolk in their ill-fated attempt to place Charles Edward Stuart on the throne.

[1 : 10] The reprisals for their rebellion left the highlands desolate. Tens of thousands emigrated to America. Those who remained are described by that English gentleman as living a wretched life.

The highlands have never fully recovered from the desolation following Culloden. If only those Macleods and those MacDonalds and those Camerons and those Mackenzies loyal to Charles Stuart had known what would come upon their people for hundreds of years to come, would they have raised the flag for Bonnie Prince Charlie and Glyn Finnan in 1745?

Would they have taken up arms against other clans like the Mackays and the Southernns? If they had known the cultural, geographic and ethnic desolation which would result, would they have so quickly raised their glasses to the king over the water and declared bloody rebellion?

Because the truth is that today large parts of the highlands of Scotland are a desert. What was once a fertile and well populated land is now virtually empty.

Within a few hundred yards walk from my family home in the highlands there are ruins which once sounded with the joy of young children but are now just cold stones in the heather.

[2 : 39] I speak as a Highlander. Some people call the highlands natural beauty but the vast majority of the highlands are empty, deserted and desolate.

If the religious leaders of Israel had known how much it would cost them as a nation for thousands of years to reject Jesus would they have done it?

Jesus looks out with great pain over Jerusalem and says Jerusalem, Jerusalem behold your house is left to you desolate. It didn't seem that way at the time.

The temple Herod had built was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. The sun gleamed off its golden towers. There were palaces there were there were great houses.

At the time of year Jesus spoke these words Passover time. There were hundreds of thousands of Jewish people milling around the streets and yet for all that Jerusalem and all its peoples are doomed to desolation.

[3 : 47] The house of Israel will suffer an even darker fate than the post-1746 howlands of Scotland. The people of God's covenant love the genetic descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be left desolate and Jerusalem and all its buildings will be razed to the ground.

The magnificent temple will be burned by fire and Israel as a nation will cease to exist. If the religious leaders of Israel had known how much it would cost them as a nation for thousands of years to reject Jesus would they have done it?

Now bear in mind we're in a gospel here we're not in Jeremiah where a doom-laid in Old Testament prophet is railing against Israel.

These are the words of the loving Son of God who has come to proclaim the kingdom of God and in love to give his life as a ransom for many. The Jesus who loves his enemies and is about to endure

crucifixion at their hands even while praying Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.

Perhaps the real Jesus is very different from the romantic version we so often make him out to be and his grace therefore far more radical than we think it ever was.

[5 : 10] The two questions we want to ask from these verses today are first how did it come to this and second how will it end?

Why will the golden towers of the temple be thrown down in the streets of Jerusalem become a desert? And perhaps more importantly for us in 21st century Glasgow today how can we avoid the same fate?

Not as much as a city but as individuals. How did it come to this first of all? How did it come to this? In the film adaptation of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings there's a scene of real emotion when Theoden King of Rohan is trapped in his fortress in Helm's Deep with his people that under siege from the evil forces of the wizard Saruman facing utter annihilation at the hands of vicious enemies with the light streaming in behind him a depressed King Theoden asks his servant how did it come to this? In 67 AD the Roman legions under Vespasian will surround Jerusalem the siege will last for nearly three years during which time the inhabitants of the city will endure unspeakable suffering at the end when the Romans under Vespasian break through Jerusalem's defences the city will be burned 200,000 inhabitants of Jerusalem will be dead the temple will be destroyed and the nation of Israel will cease to exist in 120 AD Emperor Hadrian yes that Hadrian who built the wall will sign an edict banning ethnic Jews upon pain of death from visiting or being found in the vicinity of Jerusalem at that point the Jewish leaders covered with the blood of their own people and looking ahead to a 2,000 year exile will say to one another how did it come to this?

[7 : 22] how did it come to this? one thing's true it wasn't out of any lack of willing on God's part for it to be different in verse 37 Jesus looks over the city and says Jerusalem Jerusalem how often I have wished to gather together your children in the same way a hen gathers its chicks under its wings in full knowledge of the fate of Jerusalem Jesus mourns over it with tender longing and deep affection the repetition of a name in the Bible is a sign of God's love and care Samuel Samuel Samuel God called the boy prophet in the dark temple Abraham Abraham Abraham God called to his friend Simon Simon Simon Jesus called to an overconfident Peter Jerusalem Jerusalem Jerusalem Jesus mourns over the city he loves wholeheartedly whatever desolation occurs in the future for Jerusalem it is not out of a lack of tender love on the part of Jesus in verse 33

Jesus Jesus has spoken of the judgment of hell or more literally Gehenna the valley of rotting smouldering corpses none in that valley shall ever be justified in saying I'm here because Jesus didn't love me no such will be the judgment that they'll be forced to say he loved me and he called me by name there shall be many in the eternal darkness who shall say I heard his voice lovingly calling my name not just once but twice but I did not hear him in verse 37 Jesus then talks about the prophets and those sent to you over the centuries God had sent his people hundreds of godly prophets priests and kings men and sometimes women who sounded a voice in the wilderness and called

God's people back to him and they spoke passionately of God's love Isaiah speaks to God's people on God's behalf and says to them come let us reason together though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow Hosea opens up his heart to God's people how can I give you up God says to them my heart is torn within me none in the everlasting misery of Gehenna shall be justified in saying I'm here because God never spoke to me and God never told me how to be right with him such will be the judgment that they will be forced to say he loved me he called my name I knew I knew very well what I had to do I knew I had to believe in the name of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour I am without excuse for although I knew it I did not do it but then

Jesus says simply the most astonishing thing how often I have wished to gather your children together as a hen gathers its chicks under her wings the word hen here could mean any kind of bird but that's the image with which we are most familiar that of a hen brooding over its chicks protecting them holding them close to her so they can feel her heartbeat and enjoy her loving warmth and know they're safe in an agrarian society Jesus would have been powerfully familiar with that image likewise the Old Testament speaks powerfully of God's wings stretched over his people even from Malachi chapter 4 verse 2 where we read for you who revere my name the son of righteousness will arise with healing in its wings here we have the great wings of God holding and protecting his people bring them close to him so they can feel his heartbeat and enjoy his loving warmth and know

they're safe and Jesus statement it shocks and astonishes but even these very Pharisees who are trying to trap him and destroy him Jesus desire for them is that they be his they are facing utter devastation a desolation worse than that of post-Culloden Scotland but it could all have been so different for Jesus himself God in the flesh wished for Israel's children to hide themselves under the shelter of his wings to acknowledge him as Messiah and to enjoy his loving warmth little did those to whom Jesus spoke here knew that as a hen stretches out its wings to protect its young so in little under 48 hours time from Jesus speaking these words he'd be stretching out his arms on the cross he'd be ripped apart as the sin offering for his people but the people of Jerusalem refuse to find healing under the crucified wings of the son of righteousness but then from the darkness of hell no one will ever be justified in saying

[13:06] I'm here because Jesus did not want me for himself I'm here because Jesus didn't want me no such will be the judgment they'll be forced to say everything Jesus did he did in order to gather me to himself but I would not come literally notice how Jesus says how often I have longed or more literally how often I have wished or perhaps even more how often I have wanted he longed for the people of his covenant love the genetic descendants of Abraham Jacob and Isaac the historic people of Moses and David the nation he'd redeemed from its slavery in Egypt its captivity in Babylon he longed for it he wanted it to be gathered to him that was his wish but they would not come many years after the fall of Jerusalem the leaders of the people of

Israel will ask each other how did it come to this and it can never be said by them because God wasn't for us or because God didn't want it to be different in our culture perhaps not so much now but in recent years we've had this weird argument which questions Christ's intention for us many especially from the western highlands believed that the reason they weren't Christians is because they thought God had not willed it or wanted it to be so overtaken with doctrines which were never for them and overemphasizing one teaching of the Bible over against another they say I'm not predestined to be a Christian God hasn't willed it none in during hell's desolation shall in light of Matthew 23 37 ever be justified in saying the reason

I'm here is because Jesus didn't want me such will be the judgment that they shall be forced to say I know he wanted me the real problem was I didn't want him whose fault was the desolation of Jerusalem the fault does not lie with Jesus his actions his attitudes his actions have been nothing but faithful his attitude nothing but loving no the fault does not lie with a Jesus whose heart breaks for the fate of a city he loves a nun experiencing the eternal desolation of hell shall ever be justified and saying I am here because God never called me because God never told me what I needed to do that God never assured me of his love for me and that he wanted me the fault as we can clearly see from verse 37 lies with the Jerusalem Jesus loves that

Jerusalem which stoned the prophets killed those God sent to it it's the Jerusalem which though Jesus longed for it it didn't wish for him so actually the same word Jesus uses in verse 37 on two occasions but translated two different ways in English Jesus says how often I have longed actually how often I have wanted and then the last phrase but you did not long you did not want you you were not willing I wanted but you did not want the fault lies entirely at the door of those who rejected their Messiah and instead of trusting in him crucified him how did it come to this King Theoden asks his people as they face annihilation how did it come to this the leaders of Jerusalem ask as the golden towers of Herod's temple are burned in Roman flames ultimately it's because they did not want

Jesus as King and continually over the course of a thousand years and more refused his loving invitations to them it causes us to tremble I take no joy in seeing these things at all it causes us to tremble at the thought that so many enduring the eternal desolation of hell's Gehenna today heard the gospel in which the loving Jesus stretched out his arms on the cross for their forgiveness and salvation but they refused to believe they refused to come and why did they refuse to believe it was not because God did not want them to it was because they did not want to with the tender forcefulness of our Lord I want you to hear his voice in your ears calling to you replace the city of [18:20] Jerusalem in verse 37 with your Christian name and repeat it to yourself for this is the voice of Jesus to you today in my case oh Colin Colin you who killed the prophets and stoned those I said to you how often I have longed to gather you like a hen gathers its chicks under its wings but you were not willing how can any here resist the tender call of Jesus to be gathered to him he longs for you today he wants you to come how did it come to this and then secondly how will it end how will it end it would appear to me that the highlands of Scotland have not yet recovered from the

cultural economic and geographic desolation following

Culloden in 1746 and after the highland clearances the end of its desolation in the highlands is not in sight who knows when that desolation will end but such is not true for Jerusalem and its peoples and such is not true for any of us today who fear the darkness of hell in verse 39 Jesus says for I tell you you will not see me again until you say blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord the verbs Matthew uses in this verse do two things first to describe a time in the future when Jerusalem and its peoples will finally acknowledge Jesus as their but secondly they describe the condition under which the desolation of God's curse shall be reversed namely that those who currently reject Jesus embrace him as God's Messiah the one who has come in the name of the Lord to be the Savior and King of his people the topic of the future place of the Jews in the plans of God occupy the minds of many of Christianity's best thinkers our historic position in the reformed church in Scotland has been to use Romans chapter 9 through 11 and Paul's discussion there as our focal point and from those chapters we learn that a day is coming when there shall be a widespread revival among the Jewish people that vast multitudes of those who are the genetic offspring of Abraham and daughters of Sarah those who were desolated in AD 70 vast numbers shall come to faith in Christ and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior that he's God's Messiah in Romans 11 15 Paul calls it life from the dead famous

Christians like Robert Manny McShane and the Boner brothers held these views dear to their hearts that's why so many of us are passionate about mission to the Jews and why we as a fellowship actively support Christian witness to Israel we are deeply convicted that Jesus words here in Matthew 23 39 point to a time in the future when the Jewish people shall en masse repent of their earlier rejection of Jesus and acknowledge him to be their Messiah when their song as a nation and as a people shall be blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord of no other ethnic grouping in the world do we have such promises from scripture they shall see their Messiah not as the humiliated victim they made him not as the object of their scorn not as the crucified criminal they shall see him as their king and they shall rejoice do you know that there are more ethnically Jewish people alive today who believe in Jesus as Messiah than have ever lived before how wonderful a thing it is when God shall reverse the desolation of Israel that that the day is coming when Jerusalem shall once again be the joy of the earth to which all nations will stream saying come let us go up to the house of the Lord but then in the second instance and with this we close Jesus words in verse 39 describe the condition under which the desolation shall be reversed namely that those who currently reject Jesus as Messiah and Lord embrace him as the one who comes in the name of the Lord back in Matthew chapter 21 the crowds which acclaimed [23 : 34] Jesus in his triumphal entry into Jerusalem called out Hosanna to the son of David blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord Hosanna in the highest needless to say the Pharisees and their scribes were not among those praising Jesus in those words they did not welcome Jesus into Jerusalem rather they crucified him outside the city and for years to come the Pharisees will persecute the early church they will imprison and murder Jewish Christians they and their kind will cause trouble over the whole known world on account of the name of Christ you only have to read the book of Acts to learn how violently they opposed Christianity but not all of them not all of them because some of them having grown up as zealous Pharisees and industrious legalists some of them came to faith in

Jesus as Lord some of them like Saul of Tarsus joined in the song of the triumphal procession blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord and yes the desolation of Jerusalem still hurt them after all we do have Romans 9 through 11 in our Bibles but on the inside these Christian Jews were not desolate at all rather their hearts were filled with the burning hope of the glories of their Messiah though on the outside these first century Jewish Christians to whom Matthew was writing this gospel some of whom had been Pharisees may have been entirely as poor as the Highlanders after 1746 on the inside they were content with what they had their lives were not wretched their lives meant something and all because they'd come to experience the grace of Christ for themselves the

Jesus they'd mercilessly hounded had not merely forgiven them their sin he'd given them joy in believing and so as we close we do so with this question will we at the end of our lives when all that lies before us is a dark eternity be asking ourselves the question how did it come to this for all our wealth and for all our status and for all our popularity shall we look back with regret that we lived it all without Jesus learn a lesson from the Pharisees for even though at this point they hated Jesus at

least some of them later came to a saving faith in him and believed in him and you can too right here right now open your heart to him acknowledge him to be your lord and savior and say blessed is he who comes in the name of the lord let us pray perhaps oh lord we wouldn't choose if we had the choice to meditate on such texts as

Matthew 23 37 39 which speaks the desolation of Israel perhaps we choose to be more upbeat choose lighter topics which people find more attractive and yet there's a hell to be avoided there's a darkness to be turned away from and the only way in which that's going to happen is if we profess that Jesus Christ is lord and have him take away all our sins father god you love us you love us with all the protectiveness and with all the warmth of a mother hen who gathers its chicks under her wings lord if there be any yet who remain ungathered among us who remain outside your loving wings the shelter of your wings who cannot hear the heartbeat of your love which pounds moment by moment we ask that right here right now you would open their hearts to the truth of who you are and how much you love them in Jesus name we pray these things amen love