

Jerusalem The Focus Of Failure

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[0 : 01] I would like just to put before you a very simple proposition with which I hope you're not familiar. One is that this is the person here whom I would like to have you focus on.

This is the person, these two people here are, in this instance, his wife, and then this is his mistress. Now, what happens in this situation is that a man or a woman, whichever it may be in this case, sets up for themselves two truths.

This is true and can be verified by law, and this is true and can be verified by the longings and desires of the heart. And he has to spend his life trying to keep these two truths from coming together, trying to maintain them separately, because he knows that they will clash with one another.

And therefore, for at least some period of his time, he's in the agonizing position of being caught with two truths in his life and being pressured more and more and more to say, which is the truth for you, which are you going to choose.

And there's a lot of pressure on him to make a choice like that. Now, the reason I give you that homely illustration is because that is the way we relate to the city.

[1 : 45] The city is our mistress, and in a sense, our private home and family life is our God. And so we have these two truths that we live between.

And very often the city is much more profoundly satisfying to us than the problems and difficulties which come with going home. And so we spend more and more time and get more and more involved in the life of the city and the life that the city provides for us.

We dress to meet its standards. We talk to meet its standards. We develop the morality which it dictates to us. We worship the things it commands us to worship.

And so this is the truth. And going home, we sometimes come home to a rather less pleasant truth, more demanding truth that perhaps we find less congenial to us.

And so that's the way we have to live our lives. And when I begin today to talk about ten cities of the New Testament, I'm really talking about how we live with this particular stress, the two truths in our life.

[3 : 01] And I very often run up against people who are so excited by this that you dread for this situation, or people who say, I've had it.

I don't want it anymore. I've gone as far as I can go. It's just not going to meet what my life is all about. I've got to get out. I've got to break off this relationship to the city.

But, you know, any wise mistress will be able to handle that problem and get you to change your mind and reckon that you'll be back next week.

So that is the kind of cloying relationship that you have on the one hand, as opposed to this relationship on the other hand.

And you live most of your life caught in trying to balance two truths, which are fundamentally in conflict one with another.

[4 : 02] And that's what the city does for us. Because the city sets up what Jacques-Élou calls a counter-creation. There is the creation by God, which is our world and in which we live.

And then there is the counter-creation, which man sets up independent of God, where there is no ultimate dependency upon God.

There were medieval cities whose skylines were marked by cathedrals, but our great modern contemporary 20th century city, our skyline is marked by banks and places of commerce.

And so you have that conflict that you have to live with. Well, I tell you this because if you want one other picture of it, and this is fundamentally a picture of Jerusalem, and it's in Ezekiel chapter 16.

And in Ezekiel chapter 16, you have the story of the Lord going out and finding in a field an abandoned female infant with its umbilical cord uncut, still bloody, still dirty from the process of birth.

[5 : 34] And the Lord takes that child and cleanses it and nourishes it and feeds it and clothes it and brings it up. And it becomes a beautiful, and she becomes a beautiful, beautiful woman who owes her very life to the fact that the Lord went out and got her and cared for her, and she developed into the person that she is.

But now having achieved beauty, she discovers that she doesn't have to depend any longer on the one who has husbanded her, but she is very attractive to a whole lot of other people.

And because of this, instead of her living in relationship to the Lord, she is now living in relationship to all the people who gather about her and are attracted by her beauty.

And this picture in Ezekiel 16 is the picture of Jerusalem, this same sort of dichotomy that exists between her true loyalty and the loyalty which, well, in a sense, the response she makes to those who are infatuated by her.

And that's, you know, that's the problem at the heart of all of us that live in the city. You know, it's very attractive, very rewarding, very fulfilling, until suddenly it turns against you and dismisses you.

[7 : 18] Then you have some other feelings. But for the most part, it has the rewards that you want, and you're prepared to give everything for them.

And yet in your heart, you know that that ultimately is not going to satisfy you. And so you're always caught, because you know, you know that.

Well, what happens then is you turn to this story, and you see Jesus comes to the city.

And it's a very homely story indeed. Riding on a colt, the descent of the Mount of Olives, which is on the east side of Jerusalem, the Kidron Valley, which cuts off the Mount of Olives from the actual city of Jerusalem.

And Jesus is standing on the brow, about to descend into the valley and up to the city. And this is, in a sense, a high...

[8 : 24] There's a major highway runs down the Kidron Valley now, which sort of gives it a little contemporary touch. You wouldn't ride across there anymore.

But what happens then is that Jesus comes and sees the city.

His ministry is, in a sense, at a pinnacle. Lazarus, who lives over near the Mount of Olives, has been raised from the dead. The common people have suddenly been given a kind of vision.

This man, is it possible that he is the one that deep in our hearts we've been longing for, he's the one we've looked for?

You know, it's like the Chinese students bringing that sort of Statue of Liberty into Tiananmen Square, the sudden great flush of excitement, generally by young people who've never seen a tank, you know, and recognize that side of it.

[9 : 27] And it's their enthusiasm that our world has to build on, but boy, it's hard on them. And in the same way, the disciples saw Jesus, saw his coming into his capital city, thought of the countless centuries of Jewish worship and celebration, and the constant prospect from somewhere in the east would come the king, and that a great highway would be prepared for him, and that that great highway would lead right into the center of his capital city, and he would come into his city, and he would be acknowledged.

And all the disciples got caught up in this, and they considered the miracles, they considered the parables, they considered Lazarus, they considered his teaching, they considered his person, and they got sort of carried away.

This must be it. And so as he comes from the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley, blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord.

They picked up the chant which they'd used a hundred times, only this time they felt, this must be it. This must be the moment we've been waiting for. The king coming to his own city.

And Jesus comes to the city, and the disciples are all around him, and they're crying out in this way, in their ignorance of the harsh reality, the 37th Roman Legion, about to break out and deal with them.

[11 : 04] And they're insensitive to that. The Pharisees are sensitive to that, and they say, tell them to be quiet. And Jesus surprisingly says, they can't.

You know, if they are quiet, the very stones will cry out. And there's a lot of stones in Jerusalem. And you see that there is a kind of underlying, rock-hard truth that ultimately you cannot ignore. There's a truth that belongs to stones that human hearts perhaps cannot perceive. And so he says, this is so basic, what's happening here, that if they don't cry out, the stones will. And so Christ makes his way towards Jerusalem. And as the whole city with, you know, crowned by the temple, and the temple courts come into his view, there he pauses, and there he weeps. And there Jesus speaks to the city. He's not addressing anybody in particular. He's addressing the city. And he says, would that even today you knew the things that make for your peace. [12:28] you know, would that, would that even today you, Jerusalem, knew what belonged to your peace.

You knew where your life really was. You knew who you really were. You as a city, you know, addressing a whole group of people.

He says, would that you knew in this hour, but it's hid from your eyes. And, and you, and the passage goes on and says, this relationship, which to you is the relationship of choice under the circumstances.

This relationship is going to result in. And inevitably is it, it, he says, this is what it's going to result in. It's hid from your eyes now, but your enemies will cast up a bank about you, surround you, hem you in on every side, dash you to the ground, you and your children within you.

And they will not leave one stone upon another because you didn't know at the day of your visitation what the appropriate choice was.

[13:50] when the truth came, you weren't ready to acknowledge it. And that's what he says. And, and he says, so in a sense, the, the inevitable process, which, which Christ saw as being already in the works, you know, that one day, the gates of the Antonia, the Roman garrison would open up and the Roman legions would come out and this city will be destroyed.

That's the result of your choice. And your choice is, in a sense, marked by this moment when the disciples and those who had heard Jesus acknowledged him as he came into the city and the Pharisees said, tell him to be quiet.

And he went, from there, he went into the city, he went right into the heart of the city, to the temple. And, the temple was, as I was trying to tell somebody the other day, the temple was the shopping center, the banking center, the legal center, the religious center, the center for commerce and retail. It was everything, was there in the, in the temple courts, the whole center of the city. So that Jesus walks into the center of the city. And when he comes into the center of the city, he says, see, right here at the heart, there is something wrong.

This is to be a house of prayer. And, and robbers are, are the people that dominate. And, so he said that, you know, that in a sense, he came, he didn't, he didn't, you know, he didn't, in a sense, do anything particularly violent, but he came to the city.

[15:53] And, it says that, the chief priests, the scribes, the principal men of the people, somehow recognized that, he didn't belong.

And, that they would have to, in order to preserve, to preserve the particular lie that they had subscribed to, that they would have to destroy.

And, so the plans are afoot, to destroy him. And, Jesus goes back to the, to the disciples. I mean, he goes into the temple. And, you see the end of the passage there.

He was teaching daily in the temple. The chief priests, and the scribes, and the principal men of the people, sought to destroy him. And, they were not fools.

They were wise men. They recognized, that that's what they had to do. That was a truth, that they had committed themselves to. A truth, which Christ, by his presence, denied.

[17:04] You know, and it's, it's what's spoken of in Corinthians, when it says that, that the wise men, of this world, that, if they had had, godly wisdom, instead of human wisdom, they would not have crucified, the Lord of glory.

But, they have that kind of, human wisdom. the kind of human wisdom, that, makes the, stock exchange work, makes the courts work, makes the, the church, as an institution work.

That kind, I mean, you saw it, I mean, if you saw that, Jesus of Montreal film, which I didn't like at all. But, I liked very much. My ambiguity, I've just covered both sides of the fence.

I, I, I, but, I mean, you, you, you, it portrayed in a, in a quite remarkable way, the way the, the, the, the institutional church, and the law, and everybody else, responded to this person, you know, and

wanted him to be other than he was.

Wanted him to, in a sense, reinforce the lie, which they had chosen. And, you know, and that's why, why sociologists come along, and say that, primarily the function of religion, is to reinforce, what people want to believe.

[18 : 22] Well, that may be the function of religion, but it's not the function of Jesus Christ. And, and so, Jesus is, is here in the temple, and, and, and you find him there daily, and it says, he was teaching daily in the temple, and, the chief priests, the scribes, and the principal men of the people, sought to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people, hung upon, his, words.

So that, you know, in, in this kind of situation, you know, where, where you have, the lie, here, and, the truth, here, and you not knowing, which, one is going to reward you most, and being ambivalent about them, you know, that the, the people, hung on his words, you know, and the people who, you see, I, I hate to call it a lie, because, again, Jacques Ellul is very perceptive, and he says, one of the great, achievements, of the city, is that they can manufacture their own truth, you know, and, and so, you know, in, for most people, this is the truth, this is the, the hard reality of truth, and you have to come to terms with it, or else you're going to get, trampled into the mud, that, that the city has the, has the right to decide what the truth is, and, and, the other truth, which is, you know, which is always and inevitably in conflict with the city, you know, and that's why, most of you either have, or know people who have, this love-hate relationship to the city, you know, you, you love it because it's, in a sense, so gratifying, and can do so much, and is so exciting, and provocative, and do all those things, you love it for that reason, but, you know, that there is also, another area, in which, uh, it's not the truth, that there is something else, there is something more, and then when it comes to the sort of ultimate questions, the city can't do it for you, and that you're caught in the place where, uh, you, you, you have to recognize this, and come to terms with it, and Jesus comes, in a sense, into the heart of, the city, and, uh, the common people hung on his words, and the chief priests, and the scribes, and the principal men, among the people, recognized, a danger, in his presence, and sought to destroy him, and, uh, and you see, that's who, that's what Jesus does, for us all, in a sense, is to come in between, the truth we have chosen for ourself, and the truth which may stand independently, of ourself, the kind of truth which, uh, which we find fairly uncongenial, lots of times, but which, uh,

Jesus, uh, Jesus, says, is ultimately, where we find the meaning of our lives. Let me pray, and I'll quit. our God, we thank you for this amazing story, and, uh, the reality of the city.

We thank you for this city to which we belong, but which daily forces us to choose, and we ask that you will give us grace to choose, not help, not, not make us the prisoners of the city, but the servants of the city, as those who have found our true liberty in Christ.

us. We ask this in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[23 : 15] Amen.